

GRETCHEN CRYER AND NANCY FORD:
ELEVATING THE FEMALE VOICE IN AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATER

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DEDICATION

For my parents, Ellen Louise (Denzer) Kerns and Charles Fredric Kerns

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ABSTRACT

Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford, along with most other female creators of musicals, remain in the shadows, in spite of an increased focus by the media on women's contributions to society. The messages of Cryer and Ford's dramatic themes and songs have not been fully understood by many critics and audience members. Scholarly and popular writings on women in theater remain scarce, and literature on Cryer and Ford contains errors and promotes misunderstandings.

In this thesis, I argue that Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford, a writer and composer of musical theater respectively, tackled contemporary issues in their Broadway and off Broadway musicals, introduced new theatrical forms and musical genres to the stage, and have built a distinguished collaborative career and earned a meritorious position in musical theater heritage by incorporating these issues, in particular, those which pertain to women or those which affect women, into their works. I seek to correct and build upon extant writings and information from media resources. My thesis is the first monograph to detail the lives and works of Cryer and Ford, and to assess their contributions to the musical theater genre. My detailed case studies dissect several Cryer and Ford musicals, which speak directly to prominent images and ideas of the time, and reveal how their works emphasize the importance of interpersonal communication, and endorse humanism and, in particular, feminism. Cryer and Ford are trailblazers for other female musical writers, for whom they have advocated, and for whom I provide a comprehensive overview.

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INTRODUCTION

Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford met as college students in 1953, and, a year later, put their heads together to conjure up a musical theater piece for a university competition. Sixty-four years later, Cryer, a bookwriter-lyricist, and Ford, a composer, continue to create musicals, and have thus maintained a decades-long collaboration that has contributed novel and imaginative works to the repertoire. Most people outside of the American musical theater industry, however, and even many enthusiastic fans of musicals, are unfamiliar with the names of Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford. A quick survey of the most acclaimed composer-lyricist pairs might include George and Ira Gershwin, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, Alan J. Lerner and Frederick Loewe, John Kander and Fred Ebb, and Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice. Women were primarily bookwriters and lyricists in the 1920s, with Dorothy Fields and Betty Comden emerging as well-known contributors. Other than these two musical theater legends, no women sustained significant careers as composers or writers until the arrival in the 1960s of Cryer and Ford.

The popular and scholarly commentary on Cryer and Ford primarily credits them for their first “feminist” musical, *I’m Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road*, and addresses little else of their lengthy collaboration. The material on Cryer and Ford contains omissions and inaccuracies that obscure their personal and professional biographies, and preclude their recognition as significant female musical creators, and their position in the heritage of women in theater.

In this thesis, I argue that Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford, a writer and composer of musical theater respectively, tackled contemporary issues in their Broadway and off Broadway musicals, introduced new theatrical forms and musical genres to the stage, and have built a distinguished collaborative career and earned a meritorious position in musical theater heritage by incorporating these issues, in particular, those which pertain to women or those which affect women, into their works. This study, the first monograph devoted exclusively to Cryer and Ford, seeks to correct and build upon extant writings and information from media resources that chronicle their lives and careers. Cryer and Ford's lengthy joint career provides an opportunity to survey the lives of two women who have persevered in a male-dominated industry to become long-term musical theater creators. A few of their accomplishments include the off-Broadway Obie, Drama Desk, and Outer Circle Award-winning musical, *The Last Sweet Days of Isaac* (1970); their reputation as the first female writer-composer team on Broadway for their musical, *Shelter* (1973); and their 1,165-performance hit, *I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road* (1978), which was produced in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and London theaters, among others, and which enjoyed a revival in the inaugural season of Encores! Off-Center series in New York in 2013.

Literature on women in musical theater reveals gaps in research. The negligence of study on women in the profession in general results in the omission of many bookwriters, lyricists, and composers who have made strides throughout the century. To my knowledge, my thesis is the first to present a comprehensive overview of women who write or compose for New York professional theater. I provide commentary on female

musical theater creators and their works, and trace Cryer and Ford's vigorous record of advocacy for women in the profession.

This monograph selects and examines historical details to provide a snapshot of the musical theater industry with respect to contemporary cultural factors, which shaped both the shows Cryer and Ford wrote, and the lives they led. A lack of attention to the overall goals of musical theater and how they changed over time, and the differences between professional theater in Manhattan's Broadway and off-Broadway venues results in contextual ambiguity for the works of Cryer and Ford. In my thesis, I include a discussion of musical theater, which originated in the nineteenth century in a variety of subgenres including the minstrel show, burlesque, vaudeville, and operetta, and gained recognition in the twentieth century as a leading American entertainment form, commonly referred to as the "musical" by the 1960s.¹ From that decade forward, I provide details about Broadway and off-Broadway trends as context for the musicals of Cryer and Ford and others.

For the purpose of showing why Cryer and Ford's partnership and artistic output deserve recognition, I discuss their stylistic phases, including representative compositions, with respect to contemporary music both in musicals and other popular genres. I use their dramatic subject matter, including its cultural relevance, as a framework to discuss the genesis, creation, and reception of their work. Chapter One incorporates a quantitative approach to determine who the female composers are, and places Cryer and Ford among them. Chapters Two and Three explore Cryer and Ford's

¹ Geoffrey Block et al., 2014 "Musical theater," *Grove Music Online*, accessed October 2, 2018, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002262833>.

personal and professional lives, and offer examples from their very books of how they tackled contemporary political and social issues.

The Collaboration of Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford

Cryer and Ford were among the first musical creators to stake a claim for women in musical theater history. Their music has been performed in venues ranging from their own cabaret act to New York musical theater to high-profile commercial endeavors.

In their collaboration, Cryer traditionally crafts the score's dialogue and lyrics, and Ford's musical settings follow (see Chapter Two). In their earliest New York musicals, *Now Is the Time for All Good Men* (1967), *The Last Sweet Days of Isaac* (1970), *Shelter* (1973), and *I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road* (1978), Cryer and Ford address cultural and sociopolitical concerns in a realistic and entertaining fashion, engaging audiences through the use of witty dialogue, musical numbers that vary in style, and male and female characters in relatable narratives. *I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road* (hereafter called *I'm Getting My Act Together*) derived from vocalist Cryer and pianist Ford's pop-rock cabaret act, which conveyed moods ranging from sweet and romantic to brash and feisty.

Biographical information about Cryer and Ford supports a case for their personal relevancy in portraying particular scenarios in their musicals, and exposing meanings in the shows' lyrical themes. Their biographies also reveal common paths and goals that have contributed to their dynamic partnership. I discuss their collaboration with respect to several perennial gender-related topics, including women's gradual gains in a previously

male-dominated field, and an initial wave of misogynistic criticism from professional reviewers (see Chapter One).

Thematic and Musical Material

Cryer's writing focuses on characters who are searching for fulfillment in their lives. She clearly states the purpose of her books and lyrics: "What I want to communicate is the power of the individual to transform himself or herself, so audiences feel it—that people can change and grow and are not necessarily tied into old patterns, bound by old behavior."²

Several of Cryer and Ford's works speak directly to prominent images and ideas of the time, whether intellectual figures (Marshall McLuhan and Jacques Monod), popular recording artists (Carole King and other singer-songwriters), or groundbreaking films (*2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Videodrome*). In some instances, their corpus reflects contemporary people or works more than Cryer and Ford may have been consciously aware. Cryer's books and lyrics have consistently included contemporary issues and pushed at sociocultural norms. Early musical productions addressed the Vietnam War, second-wave feminism, and social alienation due to technological advancements.

Often considered the first "feminist" musical theater writer, Cryer prefers the more inclusive idea of humanism. When asked if she objects to being called a feminist writer, Cryer responds: "No. I am a feminist, but I am not just a feminist. I consider feminism as part of a humanistic point of view. In other words, I'm not just speaking

² Al Kasha and Joel Hirschhorn, "Gretchen Cryer," in *Notes on Broadway: Intimate Conversations with Broadway's Greatest Songwriters* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1987), 87.

about women's concerns. I'm thinking about all of our concerns."³ All of the musicals contain strong female characters, and her broader "humanist" voice is apparent in the first musical, *Now Is the Time for All Good Men* (hereafter called *Now Is the Time*), which centers on a male character who, as a conscientious objector, expresses moral concerns about wartime killing in Vietnam. The main female character gains strength as she engages with his ideas and opens her mind to new ways of thinking. The next two musicals placed equal weight on female and male characters who search for ways to communicate with each other in the burgeoning age of technology, and the women more boldly express their desires to dispense with role playing and live authentically. By the fourth show, *I'm Getting My Act Together*, Cryer's obvious feminist voice resounds. Cryer, in the midst of one of her and Ford's own cabaret performances, suddenly realized that the music from their cabaret act provided the means to write a stage musical about a female assertion of independence, and the resultant "battle of the sexes." When Cryer performed the lead role of Heather, her voice spoke for female empowerment in the midst of the women's movement. From that time on, Cryer's feminist nature led her to create works centered on girls and women who discover and claim their power as females.

Ford's musical choices arise from her strong empathetic responses to Cryer's characters and situations. Rather than settle on one characteristic style, Ford selects a diverse representation of popular and, at times, classical genres to set Cryer's words. Her broad knowledge of musical styles and forms manifests in the first show, *Now Is the Time*, which includes Rodgers and Hammerstein-style solos and duets, pop, folk, barbershop, and military music to provide an eclectic musical framework within which to

³ Gretchen Cryer, interview by Kathleen Betsko and Rachel Koenig, in *Interviews With Contemporary Women Playwrights* (New York: Beech Tree Books, 1987), 100-101.

develop the characters and their stories (see Chapter Three). Ford's music for *The Last Sweet Days of Isaac* (hereafter called *Isaac*) features soft and folk rock styles that step into the world of popular contemporary youth culture of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In *Shelter*, Ford shifted further into folk-rock, and experimented again with eclecticism. More radically, she enrolled in a course at the New School of Social Research in Manhattan to study the ARP synthesizer, and brought the instrument to the Broadway orchestra pit for the first time when she infused parts of the score with computer-generated sounds to represent Arthur, an artificially intelligent computer.

In *I'm Getting My Act Together*, Cryer and Ford substantially refashioned their theatrical song-writing approach by adopting the singer-songwriter style of their cabaret act. Situated alongside the burgeoning influence of rock-oriented musicals, they brought the popular genre to the New York stage for the first time. While the first three shows contained entertaining and inventive styles that poked fun at outmoded ways of thinking and subtly underscored more progressive ideas, *I'm Getting My Act Together* presented music that signaled the rising female voice in the 1970s. The show became known as the first feminist musical, due to dialogue and songs that expressed a woman's point of view.

In this musical, Cryer and Ford transpose their cabaret act onto the lives of their characters. Heather, the female protagonist, presents her macho manager with a series of numbers in the format of her new cabaret act in a way that differed from the "jukebox musicals" that originated in the 1970s and featured well-known popular hits.⁴ The style heralds the burgeoning movement of women in popular and rock music at the time, and

⁴ Among the earliest were *Beatlemania* (1977); *Elvis: The Legend Lives!* (1978); and *Ain't Misbehavin'*, "Fats" Waller (1978). The musicals focused on well-known musical figures and their repertoire.

the authenticity that both females and males were displaying in their music. By drawing on their own intimate cabaret style, Cryer and Ford accomplished for the theatrical stage what Carole King, Joni Mitchell, and other women achieved in the broader commercial music industry. Their musicals preceded many other women's works to stake a claim on the theatrical stage (see Appendix 1).⁵

Literature Review

Since the 1980s, musicological scholarship has included musical theater and popular song styles in its purview. To support my research, I have chosen from a host of primary and secondary source materials from scholars and industry professionals in the following categories: musical theater history and topical materials; Broadway and off-Broadway theater; women in musical theater, music, and performance; and Cryer and Ford's lives and works. The following resources provide a foundation for my investigation into Cryer and Ford's contributions to musical theater, and supply insights into the theater profession and the women who write and compose for it.

Musical Theater History and Topical Materials

In the last twenty years, prominent musical theater specialists have begun to offer an array of literature in the field due to a shift in musicological research that seeks to include contemporary popular music, particularly as a means to explore sociocultural contexts. Oxford Bibliographies' list of works in the category, "Musical," demonstrates the surge of interest in musical theater study in the twenty-first century.

⁵ Appendix 1 is a compendium of female bookwriters, lyricists, and composers who have written Broadway and off-Broadway musicals from 1907-2018. Female names begin to increase by the 1970s.

I rely on three helpful resources to provide the theatrical context for my paper. *Grove Music Online*'s article, "Musical theater," includes an overview of the development of the musical, categorizes theatrical periods chronologically, and features sections on Ethnic, Chinese American, German American, and Mexican American musical theater.⁶ Musicologists William A. Everett and Paul R. Laird serve as editors for *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, a collection of musical theater articles focused on Broadway and London's West End, and arranged in four chronological sections. Part I discusses musical theater adaptation and transformation before 1940, and topics range from non-English language musical theater in the United States to the introduction of African-American musicals. Part II describes the genre's maturation from 1940-1970 through the musical plays of Rodgers and Hammerstein, and their immediate successors. Part III discusses how musical theater evolved and grew more integrated after 1970 through the work of Stephen Sondheim, and the development of new forms such as the rock musical, and the megamusical. During this time, Cryer and Ford contributed to the diversity in the field, when they experimented with new forms (see Chapter Three). Part IV examines musical theater's legacy and transformation in examples of film musicals, revivals, and musical theater preservation.⁷ Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Wolf are the editors of *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, which expands Everett and Laird's discussion by including chapters on the television musical,

⁶ Block, "Musical theater." Relevant to this study, Section 8 includes the years 1950-1975, and Section 9 includes the years 1975-2000.

⁷ William A. Everett and Paul R. Laird, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

the animated film musical, and performance and audiences.⁸ Various chapters contain useful context for the musicals Cryer and Ford composed beginning in the late 1960s. Scholars such as Jessica Sternfeld and Elizabeth L. Wollman, for example, discuss the economic struggle of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The rising cost of theatrical production and the availability of affordable entertainment forms such as movies resulted in financial concerns for theaters, and affected the longevity and success of Cryer and Ford's musical, *Shelter*.⁹

In the twenty-first century, several works discuss musical theater and its exploration of social, cultural, and political concerns, and include topics Cryer and Ford, along with other female theater writers, address in their works. Several authors present surveys of social relevancy in musical theater, or target specific issues. John Bush Jones details selected musicals from 1919 to 2000 and explains how they engage with culture and politics.¹⁰ David Walsh and Len Platt begin their study in the 1700s and continue through the present to prove how musical theater remains an emblem of modern culture.¹¹ Musicologist Raymond Knapp offers two targeted monographs. *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* examines fifteen well-known twentieth-century musicals to show how dramatic themes and musical numbers relate to American national

⁸ Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Wolf, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2011).

⁹ Jessica Sternfeld and Elizabeth L. Wollman, "After the 'Golden Age'," in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, ed. Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Wolf (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2011), 112-13.

¹⁰ John Bush Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2003).

¹¹ David Walsh and Len Platt, *Musical Theater and American Culture* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003).

identities.¹² *The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity* traces how musicals contribute to personal identity formation by describing generic types central to musical theater (drawing examples from Viennese operettas and movie musicals), and exploring specific themes (including fairy tales and fantasy, idealism and inspiration, gender and sexuality, and relationships). Relevant to Cryer and Ford's musicals, most of which lack a "happy ending" for the heterosexual relationships they explore, Knapp observes that successful stories and themes tend to revolve around conventional romantic relationships, and how reconciling opposites not only serves as an organizing principle but provides dramatic tension.¹³

Broadway and Off-Broadway Theater

Other than their musical, *Shelter*, which had a short Broadway run of thirty-one performances in 1973, Cryer and Ford's musicals were held in Manhattan's smaller off-Broadway theaters, which typically hosted musicals that were less commercially-driven, and more economical to produce. According to an article in *Playbill* in 2017, Broadway is a district on the west side of midtown Manhattan, and off-Broadway theaters must be located in Manhattan. Off-Broadway theaters outnumber Broadway venues by a more than two to one ratio, which argues for the need for more research on off-Broadway production.¹⁴

¹² Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹³ Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 264.

¹⁴ Ruthie Fierberg, "What Is the Difference Between Broadway, Off-Broadway, and Off-Off-Broadway?" November 11, 2017, accessed August 10, 2018, <http://www.playbill.com/article/what-is-the->

Several notable theater writers offer works specific to Broadway and off-Broadway theater. Dan Dietz provides two monographs I use to confirm the factual details of Cryer and Ford's works, and survey works from other female musical theater creators. *The Complete Book of 1970s Broadway Musicals* includes information on Cryer and Ford's sole Broadway endeavor, *Shelter*.¹⁵ Dietz's prodigious book, *Off Broadway Musicals, 1910-2007: Casts, Credits, Songs, Critical Reception and Performance Data of More Than 1,800 Shows*, is dedicated to musicals originating off Broadway, and includes details on nine shows in which Cryer and/or Ford participated as musical writers or actors.¹⁶ Dietz includes twenty-one appendices, although no appendix focuses exclusively on women as I do in my own Appendix 1. Dietz's Appendix I, Women's Musicals and Revues, discusses shows either feminist in nature or which deal with women's issues, and Appendix M, Composer and Lyricist Tribute Revues, includes revues by both female and male composers and lyricists.¹⁷ Musical theater author Thomas S. Hischak also offers a monograph exclusive to off-Broadway musicals that provides statistics and brief commentary on three Cryer and Ford musicals, and other female musical writers such as

difference-between-broadway-off-broadway-and-off-off-broadway. At that time, there were forty-one Broadway theaters, and approximately eighty-five off-Broadway theaters in New York.

¹⁵ Dan Dietz, *The Complete Book of 1970s Broadway Musicals* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

¹⁶ Dan Dietz, *Off Broadway Musicals, 1910-2007: Casts, Credits, Songs, Critical Reception and Performance Data of More Than 1,800 Shows* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010).

¹⁷ Dietz, *Off Broadway Musicals*, Appendix I, 517-18; Appendix M, 518-19. Dietz includes the following works that involve Cryer and/or Ford: *Anne of Green Gables*, *Cut the Ribbons*, *I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road*, *The Last Sweet Days of Isaac*, *Now Is the Time for All Good Men, To Whom It May Concern*, and *The Wedding of Iphigenia*. Tribute revues for women include *Hang on to the Good Times*, Cryer and Ford; *Hey, Love*, Mary Rodgers; *Just Once*, Cynthia Weil and Barry Mann; *A Lady Needs a Change*, Dorothy Fields; *Love, Janis*, Janis Joplin; *A Party with Betty Comden and Adolph Green*, Comden and Green; *Step Into My World*, Micki Grant; *Tapestry*, Carole King; and *They Wrote That?* Weil and Mann.

Elizabeth Swados, Megan Terry, and Marianne de Pury mentioned in my study.¹⁸ Author Ethan Mordden narrates, in an entertaining style for the lay reader and scholar alike, the history of musical theater from the 1700s through the present, and I incorporate his discussion on the characteristics of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals into my description of the characters in Cryer and Ford's musical, *Now Is the Time*.¹⁹ Mordden's book on various 1970s Broadway musicals, one in a series of monographs that focus on different decades, omits Cryer and Ford's only Broadway offering, *Shelter*, and erroneously includes one of their off-Broadway musicals, *Isaac*.²⁰ Although the monographs above acknowledge Cryer and Ford's musicals, I find more detailed information on the collaborators in materials mentioned below.

Women in Musical Theater, Music, and Performance

A growing number of scholars, both men and women, are focusing on women's issues in musical theater. Composer Jill Halstead asks the question Cryer presented in her advocacy work for women: "Why are there so few females writing musical compositions?" Halstead examines physiological, social, and political factors that have discouraged women's careers.²¹ Musicologist Elizabeth Wollman places her attention on

¹⁸ Thomas S. Hischak, *Off-Broadway Musicals Since 1919: From Greenwich Village Follies to The Toxic Avenger* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2011), ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁹ Ethan Mordden, *Anything Goes: A History of American Musical Theatre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). The OUP website for the book calls Mordden "an authority on the American musical," and a review from the *Wall Street Journal* on the website calls the book a "survey of an art form seen through the eyes of a breathless and opinionated host."

²⁰ Ethan Mordden, *One More Kiss: The Broadway Musical in the 1970s* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).

²¹ Jill Halstead, *The Woman Composer: Creativity and the Gendered Politics of Musical Composition* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 1997).

the socially conscious themes of the musicals, including *I'm Getting My Act Together*, acknowledging the show's musical numbers, and how they describe the challenges of being a liberated woman in a man's world. Wollman offers a sampling of musical observations that includes short descriptions of the purpose, style, and instrumentation of several songs. Two chapters compare the issue of feminism in "angry" and "not-so-angry" musicals, and provide a clear view of the strategies of their musical creators, critical and audience response, and how *I'm Getting My Act Together*, in the latter category, won audience approval.²² Theater historian Stacy Wolf provides a feminist history of musicals on Broadway in a decade-by-decade analysis of women's roles in leading musicals, beginning in the 1940s and extending into the twenty-first century.²³ Wolf's chapter, "Gender and Sexuality," in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical* discusses the representation and performance of gender and sexuality through musical theater characters and character types. Wolf's discussion of heterosexual as well as gay and lesbian roles provides context for the analysis and interpretation of relationships in musicals, and is useful in the evaluation of many shows listed in Appendix 1.²⁴ Wolf shows how cultural shifts that occurred from one time period to the next affected topical matter and female roles. Wolf informs my study through her explanation of how an attitudinal change from 1970s second-wave feminism to a 1980s

²² Elizabeth Wollman, "The Adult Musical Meets Second-Wave Feminism: *Mod Donna*," and "Not-So-Angry Feminist Musicals," in *Hard Times: The Adult Musical in 1970s New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 88-107, 109-29. Companion Website: www.oup.com/us/hardtimes.

²³ Stacy Wolf, *Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁴ Stacy Wolf, "Gender and Sexuality," in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, ed. Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Wolf (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2011), 210-24. Cryer and Ford's model is best described in "Characters In Relation: The Heterosexual Couple and Homosocial Communities," 213-16.

feminist backlash tempered the exploration of feminist ideas. In Rick Altman's edition, *Genre, The Musical: A Reader*, Lucy Fischer's writing on the sexist stereotyping of female roles based on image pertains to two of Cryer and Ford's musicals.²⁵

Several monographs focus exclusively on the contributions of women in theater. Bud Coleman and Judith Sebesta serve as editors for a wide-ranging collection of essays that examine the various roles women play in musical theater, and significant contributions they have made. Sebesta includes an essay on Cryer and Ford, discussed below.²⁶ The writings include commentary on theaters ranging from community productions to Broadway, and consider history, biography, show analysis, and numerical data on women's positions.

Most contemporary monographs on musical theater composers focus on men, such as Rodgers and Hammerstein, Andrew Lloyd Webber, and Stephen Sondheim.²⁷ Occasionally, female musical theater writers are folded into collections such as Herbert Keyser's *Geniuses of the American Musical Theater: The Composers and Lyricists*, which includes biographies on Betty Comden and Dorothy Fields among the twenty-nine entries for men.²⁸ This imbalance demonstrates the need for more attention to women as writers-composers in the theater industry.

²⁵ Lucy Fischer, "The Image of Woman as Image: The Optical Politics of *Dames*," in *Genre, the Musical: A Reader*, ed. Rick Altman (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 70-84.

²⁶ Bud Coleman and Judith A. Sebesta, ed., *Women in American Musical Theatre: Essays on Composers, Lyricists, Librettists, Arrangers, Choreographers, Designers, Directors, Producers and Performance Artists* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008).

²⁷ Todd S. Purdum, *Something Wonderful: Rodgers and Hammerstein's Broadway Revolution* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2018); Andrew Lloyd Webber, *Unmasked: A Memoir* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2018); and Robert L. McLaughlin, *Stephen Sondheim and the Reinvention of the American Musical* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2016).

²⁸ Herbert Keyser, *Geniuses of the American Musical Theatre: The Composers and Lyricists* (Milwaukee, WI: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2009).

In his dissertation, scholar Joseph John Stollenwerk notes the gap in scholarship relating to women who create musicals, and targets a fifteen-year period, 1970-1985, which is relevant to my focus on four of Cryer and Ford's works in the late 1960s and 1970s. Stollenwerk analyzes thirteen musicals through a variety of feminist lenses, including the women's movement. Although Cryer and Ford are lauded as the first female writing team on Broadway for their 1973 musical, *Shelter*, Stollenwerk disputes the claim by citing three musicals written, at least in part, by women prior to *Shelter*: *Inner City* (1971), *Dear Oscar* (1972), and *Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope* (1972).²⁹ Stollenwerk fails to account for the fact that a man, Tom O'Horgan, conceived the book for *Inner City*, and Micki Grant's book and score for *Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope* was not written in a partnership. Writer and lyricist Caryl Gabrielle Young and composer Addy Fieger are the only challenge to Cryer and Ford as the first female team for their production, *Dear Oscar*. The show preceded *Shelter* by less than two months, ran for five performances, and unlike Cryer and Ford's lengthy professional partnership, Young and Fieger show no further evidence of musical writing.³⁰ Stollenwerk's claim, therefore, lacks the substance needed to challenge Cryer and Ford's position.

Chapter One places Cryer and Ford within the context of other female musical theater writers and composers. Three articles greatly aided my search for the names of these women, and many of them are referenced in more than one article.³¹ Two

²⁹ Joseph John Stollenwerk, "A Musical of One's Own: American Women Writing Musicals 1970-1985" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2016), 53-54.

³⁰ Accessed October 29, 2017, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/dear-oscar-3152>.

³¹ The articles' web sources: (1) Jennifer Ashley Tepper, "10 Musicals By Women You Don't Know—And Should," October 23, 2015, <http://www.playbill.com/article/10-musicals-by-women-you-dont-know-and-should-com-368183>; (2) Kevin Michael Jones, "Celebrating 25 Women Songwriters in Musical

databases—the Internet Broadway Database for Broadway shows, and the Lortel Archives for off-Broadway shows—confirm the official dates of production openings (not including preview performances) and closings.³² Many theatrical websites, and online journal and newspaper articles provide details that enrich the musical writers’ biographies.

Cryer and Ford’s Lives and Works

Cryer and Ford hit a peak of productivity when they presented four professional musical productions from 1967 to 1978. Their ongoing contributions to musical theater through the present day reinforce their significance in musical theater history. The availability of Cryer and Ford’s books, scores, and recordings was essential to my evaluation of their works.³³ My personal interview with Cryer and Ford and perusal of professional scrapbooks and other materials such as unpublished manuscripts and recordings were of primary importance in constructing their biographies and understanding their musicals (see Methodology below).³⁴ For additional support, I obtained primary source material through the monographs of theater writers regarding

Theatre Today,” December 10, 2015, http://musicaltheatresources.com/2015/12/10/celebrating-25-women-songwriters-in-musical-theatre-today/?blogsub=confirming#blog_subscription-2;
(3) *Broadwayworld Blog*, August 6, 2008, <https://www.broadwayworld.com/board/readmessage.php?thread=974798>.

³² Internet Broadway Database, <https://www.ibdb.com>. Lortel Archives, <http://www.lortel.org/Archives>.

³³ The books for *Now Is the Time for All Good Men*, *Shelter*, and *I’m Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road* are listed in the bibliography.

³⁴ My personal interview and unpublished manuscripts are listed in the bibliography. Two manuscripts from 2018 retrospectives include “The Song Is You!—‘Good Friends: An Afternoon With Cryer And Ford,’” Bill Rudman, moderator, March 11, 2018; and “Performance and Storytelling Session,” Weston, VT, June 16, 2018.

creators of musicals. Actor and author Kathleen Betsko and author Rachel Koenig interviewed Cryer regarding her working relationship with Ford, the intended messages of several of their most significant musicals, and about being a female writer in a male-dominated profession.³⁵ Songwriters Al Kasha and Joel Hirschhorn devote a chapter to Cryer, and discuss her working process with Ford in addition to providing details on the musicals.³⁶ Ford, who rarely appears in the literature, joins Al Carmines and Jeff Sweet to discuss musical theater composition in a monograph published soon after Cryer and Ford's first three New York productions (1967-1973). The volume contains articles by Neil Simon on playwriting, Stephen Sondheim on theater lyrics, Arthur Miller on the theater, and Clive Barnes on criticism.³⁷

All of the primary musicals included in this study, *Now Is the Time*, *Isaac*, *Shelter*, and *I'm Getting My Act Together*, have cast recordings. Two vinyl recordings of songs from Cryer and Ford's 1970s cabaret act, *Cryer & Ford* (1975), and *Cryer and Ford: You Know My Music* (1977) provide insights into the duo's singer-songwriter aesthetic.³⁸ Vocal selections are available for *I'm Getting My Act Together*, their first album called *Cryer & Ford*, and *The American Girls Revue*.³⁹

My study of Cryer and Ford's collaboration utilized resources at the New York Public Library's Performing Arts Research Collections at Lincoln Center. The Theatre on

³⁵ Cryer, interview by Betsko and Koenig, 94-108.

³⁶ Kasha and Hirschhorn, "Gretchen Cryer," 75-87.

³⁷ Al Carmines, Nancy Ford, and Jeff Sweet, "On Theater Music; Theater Music: A Discussion," in *Playwrights, Lyricists, Composers On Theater: The Inside Story of a Decade of Theater in Articles and Comments by its Authors, Selected from their Own Publication, The Dramatists Guild Quarterly*, ed. Otis L. Guernsey, Jr. (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1974), 149-64.

³⁸ All audiorecordings are listed in the bibliography.

³⁹ Vocal selections books are listed in the bibliography.

Film and Tape Archive (TOFT) houses video recordings of two of their productions, a revival of *Now Is the Time* (1971), and the original *I'm Getting My Act Together* (1978). "Vint/age 2001 Conference: Positive Solutions to an Age Old Problem" (2001) features Cryer, who moderated a panel discussion about rising above the industry's stigma of ageism.⁴⁰ I draw liberally from audio recordings of Cryer's and Ford's oral histories (both in 1987), which supply many biographical and professional details, and include their reflections on the feminist issues contained in *I'm Getting My Act Together*. The library's archives also contain musical scores, the manuscript for *Isaac* (1969), production photographs and programs, and newspaper clippings.⁴¹ Three recorded interviews with Cryer and Ford by Linda Winer (2006), Jim Morgan (2011), and Georgia Stitt (2016) are available for viewing on the Internet.⁴² Winer's interview is part of the "Women in Theatre" series sponsored by the League of Professional Theatre Women, and mixes biographical narrative about Cryer and Ford with questions seeking details on their personal and professional lives. Morgan, the artistic director of the York Theatre Company, conducts a four-part series of interviews that focus on the 2011 performance that paired *I'm Getting My Act Together* with its newly-written sequel, *Still Getting My Act Together*. Of the three interviews, Stitt, who is also a composer of musicals, asks musical questions and offers fresh insights about the process of writing musicals that were the most beneficial to my concerns.

⁴⁰ The New York Public Library's "TOFT Researcher Information Sheet" describes the archive as follows: "[TOFT] is the world's foremost collection of films and videorecordings of live theatre. It includes Broadway, Off-Broadway, and regional theatre productions, as well as theatre-related documentaries, interviews, dialogues, lectures, and awards programs."

⁴¹ The New York Public Library handout describes clippings as "articles (occasionally including images) clipped from newspapers, magazines, playbills, and other types of ephemera."

⁴² All of the resources mentioned in this paragraph are listed in the bibliography.

Secondary sources include over two hundred articles that provide details that update the literature on Cryer and Ford. The reviews and newspaper and magazine articles on Cryer and Ford's New York musicals from 1969 through 1978 reveal that many critics overlooked Cryer's intended messages in the shows, and paid little attention to Ford's music. I discuss their criticism in my chapters, and challenge the commentary with my own interpretation of the musicals' meanings.

Monographs by theater and film writers provide information for my discussion on Cryer and Ford's biographies and the New York musicals, although much of the material covers the same ground, and focuses primarily on *I'm Getting My Act Together*. Theater author Judith A. Sebesta contributes biographical details from birth to the present, and includes information on their first college musicals that helped me track their chronology.⁴³ Film critic Kenneth Turan co-wrote a monograph with theater producer Joseph Papp that contains an informative chapter about the production history, reception, and long run of *I'm Getting My Act Together*. Turan collected and interwove discussions with Cryer, Ford, Papp and others that explain the unfolding of events that led to the recognition of the pair as important musical theater collaborators.⁴⁴ Professors Linda J. Snyder and Sarah Mantel's journal article assesses the suitability of repertoire from *I'm Getting My Act Together* and the American Girl revues for vocal pedagogy. The

⁴³ Judith A. Sebesta, "Social Consciousness and the 'Search for New Directions': The Musicals of Gretchen Cryer, Nancy Ford, and Elizabeth Swados," in *Women in American Musical Theatre: Essays on Composers, Lyricists, Librettists, Arrangers, Choreographers, Designers, Directors, Producers and Performance Artists*, ed. Bud Coleman and Judith A. Sebesta (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), 200-220.

⁴⁴ Kenneth Turan and Joseph Papp, "I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road," in *Free for All: Joe Papp, The Public, and the Greatest Theater Story Ever Told* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 448-57.

discussion includes several other female songwriters in its attempt to bring their music to the attention of voice teachers who are interested in musical theater repertoire.⁴⁵

To position Cryer and Ford's professional partnership within musical theater and singer-songwriter contexts from the 1960s to the present, I draw material from two *Cambridge Companion* editions, an autobiography by Carole King, three monographs, and a pertinent dissertation. Three of Cryer and Ford's early New York musicals contain numbers that use vocalists and instrumentation to provide a contemporary sound, such as the soft rock group called The Zeitgeist in *Isaac*, and the singer-songwriter music in *I'm Getting My Act Together*, performed by the lead character, a female backup duo, and male guitarists.

Musicologist Scott Warfield identifies common features of rock musicals and provides examples in his essay in *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*.⁴⁶ Warfield offers a straightforward explanation of how the musical, *Hair*, broke away from theatrical conventions and influenced future works, including those of Cryer and Ford. I investigated the singer-songwriter style due to Cryer and Ford's contributions as cabaret performers and recording artists, and the songs they wrote for *I'm Getting My Act Together*. David R. Shumway's essay, "The Emergence of the Singer-Songwriter," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Singer-Songwriter*, reveals the historical beginnings of the style around 1968, and discusses key figures, such as Bob Dylan, James Taylor, Joni

⁴⁵ Linda J. Snyder and Sarah Mantel, "Women Composers and the American Musical: The Early Years," *Journal of Singing* 69, 6 (May 2013), 527-33.

⁴⁶ Scott Warfield, "From *Hair* to *Rent*: Is 'Rock' a Four-Letter Word on Broadway?" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, 2d ed., ed. William A. Everett and Paul R. Laird (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 235-49.

Mitchell, and Carole King.⁴⁷ Cryer and Ford entered a singer-songwriter phase of cabaret performance in the mid-1970s, and Shumway's essay helps situate them within the genre. Rupert Till provides an essay in the same edition, "Singer-Songwriter Authenticity, the Unconscious and Emotions," which defines the term "singer-songwriter," identifies characteristics of the style, and explains how composer-singers engage with emotion.⁴⁸ Till's essay is particularly useful, because little has been written about the singer-songwriter's modes of expression, and the style is particularly relevant to Cryer's writing and performance in *I'm Getting My Act Together*. The autobiography of the popular female singer-songwriter, Carole King, includes details on her personal and professional life that reveal similarities to that of Cryer and, to a degree, Ford, and provides insights into the challenges female performers faced.⁴⁹ Three monographs provide background information on the biographies and music of selected female singer-songwriters and serve as a comparison for Cryer and Ford's music and performance aesthetic in their cabaret act and in *I'm Getting My Act Together*. Sheila Weller's biographical work, *Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell, and Carly Simon*, traces the careers of King, Mitchell, and Simon from the early 1960s through the present, describes their journeys of self discovery and change, and explains their differences within the singer-songwriter

⁴⁷ David R. Shumway, "The Emergence of the Singer-Songwriter," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Singer-Songwriter*, ed. Katherine Williams and Justin A. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 11-20.

⁴⁸ Rupert Till, "Singer-Songwriter Authenticity, the Unconscious and Emotions," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Singer-Songwriter*, ed. Katherine Williams and Justin A. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 291-304.

⁴⁹ Carole King, *A Natural Woman: A Memoir* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2012).

tradition.⁵⁰ Sheila Whiteley describes how singer-songwriters from the late 1960s through the present have expressed cultural concerns, and her illuminating discussion on Mitchell reveals similarities between her and Cryer, and the element of authenticity located in their writing and performance.⁵¹ Musicologist Wilfred Mellers surveys a category of women he refers to as “singing poet-composers,” who used events in their day-to-day lives to create stories in song, much like the music in *I’m Getting My Act Together*.⁵² Christa Anne Bentley’s dissertation discusses ways in which singer-songwriter music represents the politics of the women’s movement and anti-war sentiments.⁵³ Her explanation of the element of authenticity was useful in evaluating Cryer’s lyrics and performance style in *I’m Getting My Act Together*.

Three monographs aid my understanding of vocal and musical effects, and include terminology I use to clarify Cryer and Ford’s integration of music into their works. Musicologist Kate McQuiston provides examples from two Stanley Kubrick films regarding the nuances of meaning in the computer Hal’s voice in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and the appearance of a transistor radio as a representation of young female sexuality in *Lolita*, applicable to Cryer and Ford’s musicals, *Shelter* and *Now Is the Time*, respectively.⁵⁴ Claudia Gorbman provides the first theoretical monograph on film music.

⁵⁰ Sheila Weller, *Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell, Carly Simon—and the Journey of a Generation* (New York: Atria Books, 2008).

⁵¹ Sheila Whiteley, *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity, and Subjectivity* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

⁵² Wilfred Mellers, *Angels of the Night: Popular Female Singers of our Time* (New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1986).

⁵³ Christa Anne Bentley, “Los Angeles Troubadours: The Politics of the Singer-Songwriter Movement, 1968-1975” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2016).

⁵⁴ Kate McQuiston, *We’ll Meet Again: Musical Design in the Films of Stanley Kubrick* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

In the course of theorizing the position of music in narrative films, she divides music into the categories “diegetic music” and “nondiegetic music.”⁵⁵ Scott McMillin extends the terms’ usage to musicals in his theoretical monograph on musical theater conventions such as the integration of book and numbers, characters, ensembles, orchestration, and narration.⁵⁶ McMillin includes an informative overview of the use of an orchestra, which can either provide non-diegetic underscoring or operate as diegetic group placed onstage (see Chapter Three).

Philosopher Marshall McLuhan’s 1964 study on media technology and its effects on humanity provided the context for much of my thematic analysis of *Isaac* and *Shelter*.⁵⁷ A monograph by Martin Esslin, who invented the name for and explained The Theatre of the Absurd movement, aided my discussion on the same two works, which responded to the 1960s Absurdist movement in theatrical playwriting.⁵⁸ In *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd*, Michael Y. Bennett provides an overview of the Absurd, and discusses Post-Absurdism found in later works of playwrights who were influenced by the movement.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987).

⁵⁶ Scott McMillin, *The Musical as Drama: A Study of the Principles and Conventions Behind Musical Shows from Kern to Sondheim* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁵⁷ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964).

⁵⁸ Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 3d ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2004). The book was first published in 1961.

⁵⁹ Michael Y. Bennett, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Methodology

My interest in Cryer and Ford's work began in 1978, when I had an opportunity to watch Cryer perform the leading role of Heather in *I'm Getting My Act Together* in New York City.⁶⁰ I was impressed by the show's format, music, and performances, particularly that of Cryer, and I was affected by the powerful message of female liberation and self-expression. At the time, I was unaware of Cryer and Ford's three preceding professional musicals. In recent years, I have undertaken a range of scholarly projects that explore the work of women in music, and my enduring fascination with musical theater led to my desire to write the first monograph devoted to the dual career of Cryer and Ford.

I initially decided to focus on their personal biographies, and explore their works to determine any recurrent themes in the writing, and discern whether there was a specific musical style. I perused newspaper and magazine articles, and sections of books that typically refer to them as the writer and composer of the first feminist musical. The labeling of *I'm Getting My Act Together* as feminist brought them to the attention of theater writers who were interested in delving into the topic. I quickly discovered, however, that the previous musicals were not feminist-oriented, and focused on other societal issues such as war resistance, the dangers of being consumed by emerging technologies, and, above all, the importance of interpersonal communication and truthful self-expression. I decided to explore the books, scores, and recordings of all of their musicals, along with their cabaret music and recordings, to understand their theatrical goals and processes. I was particularly interested in investigating Ford's role as the

⁶⁰ I witnessed Cryer's performance of the role again in Chicago in 1980.

composer, because Cryer is more frequently discussed as the writer of the thematic material.

I examine their musicals in various contexts: first, in relation to the works of other female musical theater writers; second, with respect to their biographies; and finally, through a detailed look at Cryer's texts and themes, supported by Ford's flexible compositional aesthetic. I discuss the ways in which the music supports the characters, and therefore serves as a fundamental part of the narrative, particularly in the case of Arthur, a singing computer that appears as an unusual diegetic phenomenon.

To navigate the lengthy collaboration between Cryer and Ford, I use a quantitative approach to provide analytical data for contextual purposes. In Chapter One, I select and discuss female writers and composers and their significant works in the twentieth century. In further support of the recognition of women's contributions, I compiled a list of female composers, bookwriters, and lyricists on and off Broadway from 1907 through 2018 (see Appendix 1). Compiling a list of names and collecting information on these women has been a piecemeal project, due to the lack of scholarly literature on the professional contributions of women. Information appears primarily on theater-related websites and industry blogs. I include a quantitative report from an ongoing study sponsored by The League of Professional Theatre Women that reveals current statistics on female lyricists and composers in the hope of improving gender parity in the industry.

Through the careful sorting and reading of hundreds of writings, I began to piece together Cryer and Ford's personal and professional biographies, from their initial inclinations to write, compose, and perform to their current musical theater projects. In

the process I discovered inconsistencies that ranged from simple mistakes in birthdates and educational credentials to larger errors that included confusing their names on photographs and switching their forenames and surnames. Even their own promotional materials on CD liner notes and biographical materials on websites at times contained misinformation that was picked up by other writers. I resolved to straighten out and confirm these details in order to provide a clear and accurate biographical chronology.

The majority of my research adopts a qualitative approach suited to the holistic process of interacting with human subjects. My study of Cryer and Ford led to an extraordinary opportunity to meet and interview them in New York City in June of 2018. I designed my interview questions to correct misinformation in published materials, and to contribute new information about many of their works that have previously been unexamined in their biographical literature. I observed a surprising divergence between their perceptions of their work and the resonance of the cultural references in their shows (see Chapter Three). I recorded and transcribed their responses to my questions, and perused Ford's professional scrapbook albums that contain memorabilia from their lengthy career.⁶¹ I was able to hear original and unpublished recordings of their Broadway musical, *Shelter*, and two current projects, *Eleanor* and *Still Getting My Act Together*, and read the unpublished manuscripts. Ford also provided me with her preferred setting for their best-known song, "Old Friend" (see Chapter Three).

My research methods necessitated careful reading of the scripts and astute listening to the recordings of their four musicals from 1967 through 1978. I select and

⁶¹ The interviews were conducted in accordance with the Human Studies Program, under the Office of Research Compliance, and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). I informed Cryer and Ford that the questions are for the purpose of scholarly research and writing for a thesis based on their collaboration.

examine historical details to illustrate the contributions of Cryer and Ford with respect to their works' cultural contexts, of which broad compositional choices are a part (see Chapter Three). I provide a more detailed look at Ford's compositional methods and wide-ranging musical choices than has previously been offered. The topics that Cryer narrated in the musicals inspired me to further explore the political and social issues she presented, and led to my realization that the messages of Cryer and Ford's dramatic themes and songs have not been fully understood. My detailed case studies dissect four Cryer and Ford musicals, and reveal how their works emphasize the importance of interpersonal communication, and advocate for both humanist and feminist voices. These methods support my argument for Cryer and Ford's importance in the field as female writers/composers, performers, and advocates for other women in the profession.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter One offers a discussion on significant female composers, bookwriters, and lyricists of musical theater from 1907 through the century's end, and illustrates that the history of women in the field includes several important phases beginning with the war-laden 1900s-1950s, when Americans sought escape through recorded sound and movement, and music for dance and in performance venues. In early musical theater, several significant trailblazers contributed predominant styles to Broadway stages. Ensuing decades include the politically-focused 1960s, when off-Broadway musicals, including *Now Is the Time*, addressed concerns about the Vietnam War; the socially-conscious 1970s, when Cryer and Ford premiered three works that grappled with contemporary social issues, and other musicals frequently dealt with concerns such as

feminism, urbanization, and the black experience; the post-feminist decade of the 1980s, when musicals at times returned to gender stereotyping via the mega-musical; and the inclusive spirit of the 1990s, when strong female protagonists, including girls, appeared in musicals as a result of a third-wave of feminism that sought diversification in racial and cultural identities. The chapter notes efforts in New York City to acknowledge women's contributions to society, and the theater community's organized attempts to promote equality for women and other marginalized industry professionals. Data from a recent study conducted by the League of Professional Theatre Women registers trends in women's participation in musical writing, and differentiates roles they have held, and continue to hold, in musical theater. The chapter targets women's musical theater creativity from 1960 through 1999 as a framework within which to highlight Cryer and Ford's musical output. I introduce their works, provide information from writings and critical reviews that both praise them and reveal obstacles they faced as women, and add original commentary that clarifies their artistic intentions, which, in many cases, were ignored or misunderstood at the time.

Chapter Two corrects misinformation and inconsistencies in published literature on Cryer's and Ford's biographies. Writers of theater reviews, non-scholarly articles, and theater websites have sometimes guessed or made assumptions about biographical details, and have even confused Cryer and Ford with each other. I worked closely with Cryer and Ford to understand the fine points of their personal and professional lives in order to provide a definitive account of their biographical history. Much of the literature on Cryer and Ford focuses on a short period of their career due to the succession of four New York musicals in an eleven-year span, and the shows' critical attention. The

additional facts and knowledge gained through my meetings, interview, and correspondence with Cryer and Ford enable me to chronicle their lives and works from their childhoods to the present, provide an understanding of their joint working process, and discuss gender related topics in their personal and professional lives. I include a section on their cabaret performances and recordings, which is an important but neglected component of their output, and a significant precursor to *I'm Getting My Act Together*. I include information on the many musicals they have planned or engaged in since that time, and update their activities through December of 2018.⁶²

Chapter Three explores the range of Cryer and Ford's work in their three off-Broadway musicals and sole Broadway musical performed between 1967 and 1978, and the singer-songwriter style evidenced in *I'm Getting My Act Together*, their cabaret performances, and two album releases. I assess their composition, dramaturgy, and lyrics through several case studies that argue for the recognition of Cryer and Ford's innovative advances in performance formats and musical scoring, particularly through the use of synthesized music, and their introduction of the singer-songwriter style to the theatrical stage. Their frequent trope of the nature of heterosexual relationships, and problems in male/female communication due to the women's movement serves as a lens for their messages of self-empowerment and self-actualization. In that respect, a larger part of the chapter is devoted to their 1978 musical, *I'm Getting My Act Together*, which is an early example of feminist musical theater that is only recently considering its own canon.⁶³ A

⁶² Appendix 2 provides a chronology of Cryer and Ford's collaborative musicals, and includes dates, venues, and production titles. Appendix 3 provides a chronology of their cabaret performances. Appendix 4 provides a chronology of Cryer's and Ford's non-collaborative theater projects. Appendices 5-13 include information on their albums, and characters/casts and musical numbers of four musicals.

⁶³ Accessed November 21, 2018, Kelly Wallace, "What Makes Musical Theatre Feminist?" March 8, 2017, <http://www.playbill.com/article/what-makes-musical-theatre-feminist>. The Firebrand Theatre in

close study of the book and songs reveals how the show advocated for females by staging scenarios that illustrated female objectification, gender stereotyping, and other means of suppression. The incorporation of their emerging singer-songwriter style in the numbers provided relatable music for their growing fan base. My analysis of their song, “Old Friend,” suggests the reasons for the music’s appeal include the conversational intimacy of the lyrics and their corresponding relaxed musical setting, performed in the authentic manner of the singer-songwriter style. The chapter includes performance data and critical reviews of four musicals, and traces how they voiced the political, social, and cultural issues of America’s landscape in the late 1960s and the 1970s.

The Conclusion provides a short summary of Cryer and Ford’s twenty-first century theater projects and cabaret appearances to show that they maintain an active presence in the industry, and continue to represent the empowered female voice in their characters, themes, and songs. Their musical, *Anne of Green Gables* (2007), is a stage version of the children’s novel and reflects their ongoing commitment to the message of self-actualization, and personal empowerment. I provide information on the revivals of *I’m Getting My Act Together* (2013), which attests to Cryer and Ford’s continued relevance, and discuss their most recent musical, *Still Getting My Act Together* (2015), which advocates for older women. Ford notes that while the first show exposes sexism, their latest musical uncovers ageism.⁶⁴ As advocates for marginalized individuals, both on and off stage, Cryer and Ford stand as role models for the profession.

Chicago is the first professional, feminist musical theater, and launched on March 27, 2017. Each musical must pass their “Firebrand Test,” their own version of the Bechtel test (see Chapter One): 1) There must be as many women as men in the cast; 2) the show must lend itself to inclusive, diverse casting; and 3) the show must empower women.

⁶⁴ Cryer and Ford, “Performance and Storytelling Session.”

CHAPTER ONE: “STRONG WOMAN NUMBER”

FEMALE WRITERS AND COMPOSERS IN AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATER

Most people, even within the theater profession, would have difficulty coming up with the names of more than a few women who have written musicals for the New York stage. The theatrical careers and accomplishments of women remain an unexplored realm of the industry’s history. In this context, Cryer and Ford emerge as a writer-composer team that produced four New York musicals between 1969 and 1978. Their working relationship, which continues at the time of this writing, and professional reputation in the New York theater industry warrant them a place in American theater history. This chapter presents a survey of women who have written and composed musical theater on and off Broadway from 1907 through the century’s end, and includes examples of their works that addressed feminist and other societal issues—urbanization, the black experience, and the dangers of technology chief among them. I show how Cryer and Ford grabbed the attention of critics and audiences by presenting bold musical productions with significant contemporary messages about war resistance, choosing one-to-one communication over technology, and feminism.

Recognizing Female Contributions and Seeking Equality

Cryer and Ford’s musicals frequently foreground female issues and provide messages of empowerment, especially in *I’m Getting My Act Together*, which arose from their experiences during the era of second-wave feminism. The history of feminism divides into first, second, and third waves, and the broad goal of the movement is equality between the sexes. After the first wave brought women the right to vote, the movement

fell into decline until a new generation of activists appeared in the late 1950s and second-wave feminism emerged. Betty Friedan's 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique*, further sparked the movement, which encouraged women to examine their roles at home and in the workplace, and shined a light on problematic issues such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, and the discrimination and prejudice inherent in sexism. The movement dissipated in the early 1980s, and its reactivation as the third wave in the early 1990s is often linked to Anita Hill's accusation of sexual harassment against Clarence Thomas in 1991.⁶⁵

Since Donald Trump's presidential inauguration in January of 2017, women have taken to the streets and appeared in the media in a show of resistance to the current administration's platforms against marginalized citizens. Concurrently, the push to chronicle women and their contributions to society has risen visibly in places like New York City. In 2017, the New-York Historical Society Museum & Library opened a Center for Women's History. In March of 2018, the *New York Times* noted that the majority of the obituaries in their archives "chronicled the lives of men, mostly white ones." They instituted a new column, "Overlooked," to honor those who have been neglected.⁶⁶ Since May of 2018, the *New York Times* has offered "Gender Letter," a weekly newsletter on women, gender, and pop culture. In July of 2018, the *New York Times* wrote that the city had concluded that statues of women were lacking, and asked readers which women who were important in the city's history should be honored with

⁶⁵ Accessed October 20, 2018, <https://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2011/03/08/international-womens-day/>.

⁶⁶ Amisha Padnani and Jessica Bennet, "Overlooked," *New York Times*, March 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/obituaries/overlooked.html>.

monuments.⁶⁷ In the fall of 2018, the Museum of the City of New York opened an exhibit, “Rebel Women: Defying Victorianism.”⁶⁸ These initiatives are important steps to correct the problem of gender imbalance.

Cryer and Ford as Advocates

Cryer and Ford have actively participated in advocacy work for several industry organizations such as the Dramatists Guild since the early days of their careers.⁶⁹ Cryer has championed women’s literary voices in theater since 1974, when she joined the Dramatists Guild Council and proposed the Committee for Women to support female writers in the industry.⁷⁰ In 1980, Cryer moderated a panel discussion, “Women: The Emerging Force in Theater,” at the American Place Theater in Manhattan. The Dramatists Guild Committee for Women and the Women’s Project of the American Place Theater sponsored the program, which discussed the growing visibility of women as playwrights and directors. Cryer commented at the time that it was unclear whether it was

⁶⁷ Ginia Bellafante and Alexandra S. Levine, “New York Today: A Need for More Statues of Women,” *New York Times*, July 5, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/05/nyregion/new-york-today-statues-women.html>.

⁶⁸ Accessed September 24, 2018, <https://www.mcny.org/exhibition/rebel-women>. The exhibit continues through January 6, 2019.

⁶⁹ The Dramatists Guild is a professional organization for playwrights, composers, and lyricists in American theater.

⁷⁰ Cryer, interview by Betsko and Koenig, 98. Cryer comments: “Part of the reason for creating the Committee for Women was to investigate why there were so few women writing plays. Were they out there without our knowledge? If so, did they not know how to channel their work to get it seen? If they weren’t out there, was it because there have been so few women playwrights in the past, that young women were not even thinking, when in college, of playwriting as a career?”

a cultural matter or “outright bias in the theaters” that had held women back.⁷¹ She remains active in the organization as the President of the Dramatists Guild Foundation.⁷²

In 1981, Ford became one of the original members of the League of Professional Theatre Women and served as an officer and board member for many years. Ford also served on the council of the Writer’s Guild of America East, was active on their Daytime Drama Committee and the Women’s Committee in the 1980s and early 1990s, and, like Cryer, is a member of the Dramatists Guild and served on the council from 2001-2010.⁷³ She has also produced interview videos for the Dramatists Guild Foundation’s Legacy Project of Micki Grant, Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty, and other prominent male writers and composers.⁷⁴

In 2001, Cryer moderated the panel, “Who Gets to Say Who is Too Old?” which advocated against ageism at the conference, “Vint/age: Positive Solutions to an Age Old Problem.” Cryer was on the Board of Directors for the New York Coalition of Professional Women in the Arts and Media Inc., who sponsored the event, and led a

⁷¹ Eleanor Blau, “Women Hail Gains In Theater,” *New York Times*, June 3, 1980, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1980/06/03/111245482.html?pageNumber=57>.

⁷² Accessed September 23, 2018, <https://www.dramatistsguild.com/resources/dgf/>. “The Dramatists Guild Foundation (DGF) is a national charity that fuels the future of American Theater by supporting the writers who create it. DGF supports playwrights, composers, lyricists, and bookwriters at all stages of their careers by sponsoring educational programs, offering space to create new works, and providing emergency aid to writers in need.”

⁷³ Nancy Ford, email correspondence to author, September 12, 2018.

⁷⁴ Accessed September 23, 2018, <https://www.dramatistsguild.com/resources/dgf/>. “DGF’s documentary series, Legacy Project, brings America’s most exciting and esteemed writers together in conversation and preserves their insights for future generations.” Ford also produced videos on Stephen Sondheim, Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick, John Kander, Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt, and Frank Gilroy. A Legacy Project video that features Cryer, Ford, and interviewer, Georgia Stitt, is available for viewing at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5c0PGzYBPtw>.

discussion that encouraged participants to embrace their wisdom and experience in order to redefine what it is to be an older woman in the arts.

Initiatives for Parity

The theater community has finally begun to take steps to promote equality for women and other marginalized people in the industry. Parity Productions, a not-for-profit theater company formed in 2016, has a mission to “develop and produce compelling new plays that give voice to individuals who rebel against their marginalized place in society.”⁷⁵ Disney Theatrical Productions and their musical, *Frozen*, in partnership with The Actors Fund, hosted the first Women’s Day on Broadway on March 12, 2018. The event featured panel discussions with Broadway women, with a goal to promote mentorship and investment in women, and foster gender equality.⁷⁶

Efforts in the theater industry to advocate for women go back even further. Since 2014, the League of Professional Theatre Women (LPTW) has conducted a series of studies that analyze the working status of females off Broadway, with the purpose: “to change the conversation from anecdotes to advocacy on behalf of women playwrights, performers, and off-stage theatre workers.” Martha Wade Steketee and Judith Binus pioneered the Women Count project, and assemble and maintain reports that include tables with gender hiring breakdowns in a wide range of theatrical categories.⁷⁷ In

⁷⁵ Accessed August 9, 2018, <https://www.parityproductions.org/our-mission.html>.

⁷⁶ Caitlin Huston, “Disney to host first Women’s Day on Broadway,” January 18, 2018, <https://broadway.news/2018/01/18/disney-host-first-womens-day-broadway/#.W258JuZyWaQ.email>.

⁷⁷ Accessed November 17, 2018, <http://theatrewomen.org/women-count/>. The website contains links to a November 2018 Press Release and a November 2018 LPTW Women Count Report PDF. A theater season runs from May through the following April.

November of 2018, the LPTW published the most recent study results in a report, “Women Count IV: Women Hired Off-Broadway 2013-14 through 2017-18.” The report covers five seasons, twenty-two producing companies, and 515 productions. The five-year span of statistics shows continued disparity between female and male composers and lyricists, but noticeable improvement in the 2017-2018 season. Data reveals that the percentage of credits for women composers ranges from eleven percent in the 2013-2014 season to twenty-seven percent in the 2017-2018 season. Credits for lyricists range from seven percent in the 2013-2014 season to forty-three percent in the 2017-2018 season.⁷⁸

In a press release about the study, Binus explains that numbers can be a powerful tool when meeting with people in hiring positions. She notes how the LPTW has sponsored other advocacy initiatives to move towards gender parity, including The Women Count March on June 12, 2018 in the Times Square theater district. The march brought awareness to #OneMoreConversation,” a social media advocacy action, that “asks theatre decision makers . . . to have one more conversation with a woman candidate before making a final hiring decision.”⁷⁹ These efforts show vigorous activity to correct a gender-specific imbalance, and although the effectiveness of this or other programs is difficult to discern, the improving numbers are encouraging.

⁷⁸ Accessed November 17, 2018, <http://theatrewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Women-Count-IV-2013-14-through-2017-18-2018-11-13-.pdf>.

⁷⁹ Accessed July 17, 2018, <http://theatrewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/2018-Press-Release.pdf>. The press release notes that the LPTW has championed women for over thirty-five years, and maintains a membership of 500+ theater artists and practitioners. LPTW spearheads “public programming, advocacy initiatives, events, media, and publications that raise awareness of the importance of nurturing women’s voices, celebrate industry luminaries, preserve the legacy of historic visionaries, and shine a spotlight on the imperative of striving for gender parity and fostering a diversity of expression, both in the theatre world and the world at large.”

Female Writers and Composers in New York Theater

Cryer and Ford's New York musical theater contributions occupy a prominent position within the context of other female Broadway and off-Broadway writers and composers. Embedded within the discussion in this and other chapters is the question of whether Cryer's books and lyrics specifically reflect primarily feminist views or are more humanistic. Cryer places feminism under the umbrella of humanism. One of Cryer and Ford's musicals, *Eleanor*, reflects on the life and relationships of Eleanor Roosevelt, and provides insight into Cryer's outlook. In a 2018 interview, Bill Rudman notes that the First Lady was responsible for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and comments that Cryer, who is a feminist, is also a humanist. Cryer explains her interpretation of the words: "A humanist hopes to create a world where everyone has a chance to reach his or her own potential. A feminist is a humanist who hopes to create a world where women can reach their own potential."⁸⁰ This simple comment is evidence that Cryer speaks for humankind, in spite of her proclivity to write for and about women.

Cryer's books reveal strong female characters from her earliest writings. The narratives in her college musicals featured young women who discovered opportunities for personal growth (see Chapter Two). The earliest professional musicals, *Now Is the Time* and *Isaac*, reflect on women and self-discovery, and the critical commentary below demonstrates that *Shelter* preceded *I'm Getting My Act Together* in delivering feminist themes. As an actor, Cryer had the opportunity to voice her own words onstage as the female lead in both *Now Is the Time* and *I'm Getting My Act Together*.

⁸⁰ Cryer and Ford, "Song Is You."

The information below brings women's contributions as bookwriters, composers, and lyricists into a male-focused discussion; surveys the contemporary themes and musical styles that emerge across the decades; highlights women's milestones in musical theater history; and positions Cryer and Ford among their peers from their earliest professional musicals in the 1960s through the present time. The selected writers and composers have contributed notable musical theater works that represent women's creative work in the industry. Their contributions often include female characters as strong protagonists, and/or express feminist themes or ideas and tackle other societal issues discussed below. I include commentary on musicals written by women from various theater writers, and provide my evaluation of these articles and reviews. Chief among my resources are published and first-hand interviews with Cryer and Ford, and email correspondence from them about their work.

Over the course of my research, I compiled information about female musical theater writers that I include in a compendium containing the names of eighty-six female bookwriters, lyricists, and composers of musicals, and information about their works from 1907 through 2018 (see Appendix 1). The compendium is the result of my intention to assemble a record of female musical creators of Broadway and off-Broadway productions. The compendium provides a tool to survey various aspects of women's history in the industry. The list illuminates at a glance, for example, the amount of compositional activity of Broadway versus off-Broadway offerings from decade to decade, and which women have been the most prolific. The list enables the user to quickly determine approximately how many women have undertaken professional projects, and how much progress has been made over the 110 years in terms of gender

parity. My hope is that this compendium will facilitate the investigation of the history of female composers for future research.

The 1900s-1950s

The focus of my survey of women who compose for musical theater is on Cryer and Ford and their contemporaries from the 1960s through the 1990s. Several significant trailblazers for women in musical theater, however, merit acknowledgement. While women are often perceived to be primarily lyricists and not composers, perhaps due to prejudices of a largely male body of commentators as well as the lengthy careers of writers Dorothy Fields and Betty Comden, women have a history of composition in spite of a patriarchal society that did not accommodate their talents. The musical writers' works appear as early as 1907, and the women listed here contributed to the predominant styles of the time. They include composer Kay Swift; lyricists and bookwriters Fields and Comden; and Anne Caldwell, Dana Suesse and Ann Ronell, the first women to write books, lyrics, and music (see Appendix 1).⁸¹

Kay Swift is significant as the first woman to compose the music for a complete score for the 1930 Broadway hit, *Fine and Dandy*. Several books detail Swift's personal and professional life and music.⁸²

Dorothy Fields was a Broadway lyricist who wrote nine books for musicals, and added words to the music of six different composers for ten musicals and twelve revues.

⁸¹ Suesse is listed in the Internet Broadway Database, but does not meet the criteria for Appendix 1.

⁸² For more information on Kay Swift, see: Vicki Ohl, *Fine and Dandy: The Life and Work of Kay Swift* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Katharine Weber, *The Memory Of All That: George Gershwin, Kay Swift, and My Family's Legacy of Infidelities* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2011); and *Fine and Dandy: The Kay Swift Songbook* (Alfred Publishing, 2011).

Fields wrote lyrics for over 400 songs, and a few of her standards include “I Can’t Give You Anything But Love,” “The Way You Look Tonight,” and “If My Friends Could See Me Now.”⁸³ Fields, along with her collaborators and producers, won the 1959 Tony Award for Best Musical for *Redhead*.⁸⁴ Two monographs chronicle Fields’s life and works.⁸⁵

Bookwriter and lyricist Betty Comden and her prodigious sixty-year collaboration with wordsmith, Adolph Green, are a cornerstone of musical theater history.⁸⁶ Comden published her memoir, *Off Stage*, in 1995.⁸⁷ Comden and Green’s contributions to Broadway musical theater hits began in 1944 with *On the Town*, with music by Leonard Bernstein and choreography by Jerome Robbins. She and Green appeared as the characters, Claire and Ozzie, in the musical. Comden’s work culminated in *The Will Rogers Follies* in 1991, with music by Cy Coleman. Alongside these women are other creative figures such as Dana Suesse and Ann Ronell. Both women were composers as well as writers and lyricists, and the 1942 revue, *Count Me In*, contains Ronell’s music and lyrics exclusively.⁸⁸

⁸³ Accessed July 21, 2018, <http://www.dorothyfields.org/shows.htm>.

⁸⁴ Accessed August 6, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/redhead-2071/#awards>.

⁸⁵ For more information on Dorothy Fields, see: Deborah Grace Winer, *On The Sunny Side of the Street: The Life and Lyrics of Dorothy Fields* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997); and Charlotte Greenspan, *Pick Yourself Up: Dorothy Fields and the American Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁸⁶ Accessed August 6, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/betty-comden-4525>.

⁸⁷ Betty Comden, *Off Stage* (New York: Proscenium Publishers Inc., 1995).

⁸⁸ Accessed July 21, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/ann-ronell-12319>.

The success of women like Fields and Comden may argue against a balance of opportunity; however, a quote by Fields reflects the common attitude of the time. When asked, “Why aren’t there more women writing songs?” Fields replied:

There aren't more lady songwriters for the same reason that there aren't more lady doctors or lady accountants or lady lawyers; simply not enough women have the *time* for careers. The man in our society is the breadwinner; the woman has enough to do as the homemaker, wife and mother. Yes, I do think song writing is a man's game. It requires push, energy, movement, mixing; and it is a field that *is* and has been dominated by men. No, I do *not* think men have more talent.⁸⁹

Fields, who was married and a mother of two, rose above society’s expectations, ardently pursued her career, and produced prodigiously in a male-dominated industry.

As early as the 1950s, a trickling of female-oriented works appeared in the musical theater repertoire. Anna Russell, a Canadian composer and lyricist, singer and comedian, composed and starred in *Little Show* at Manhattan’s Town Hall in 1953. Theater historian Jennifer Ashley Tepper calls Russell a “feminist ahead of her time,” whose parodist skills and bawdy humor “offended everyone from her parents to the patrons who protested her sold-out performances at Town Hall.”⁹⁰

Feminist themes arise in 1958 with Julie Mandel’s score for the musical, *Miss Seedless Raisin*. Mandel is a classically trained composer and lyricist who writes musical theater as well as classical works, and although none of Mandel’s shows are considered Broadway or off-Broadway musicals, she is noteworthy for her early feminist bent.⁹¹ In her own words, *Miss Seedless Raisin* is “an original send-up of the world of advertising

⁸⁹ Accessed July 21, 2018, <http://www.dorothyfields.org/quotesby.htm>.

⁹⁰ Accessed July 21, 2018, Jennifer Ashley Tepper, “10 Musicals By Women You Don’t Know—And Should,” October 23, 2015, <http://www.playbill.com/article/10-musicals-by-women-you-dont-know-and-should-com-368183>.

⁹¹ Accessed July 21, 2018, <http://www.juliemandel.com>.

and its exploitation of the female form to sell anything and everything” (an idea that appears in Cryer and Ford’s Broadway musical, *Shelter*). Another of her musicals, *A Glorious Day*, is based on George Bernard Shaw’s play, *Getting Married*, and the character of Edith is described on Mandel’s website as “a fiery woman’s libber.”⁹²

Two well-known women who began their professional careers in the 1950s are lyricist Carolyn Leigh and composer Mary Rodgers Guettel. Cryer worked with Leigh’s lyrics when she was cast in the chorus of *Little Me* in 1962.⁹³ In the 1950s and 1960s, Leigh collaborated with several well-known composers, including Elmer Bernstein, Jule Styne, Cy Coleman, and Marvin Hamlisch.⁹⁴ Mary Rodgers Guettel was the daughter of composer Richard Rodgers, who created many of Broadway’s most successful hit musicals, first with lyricist Lorenz Hart, and later, lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II. She began her Broadway career as the composer for *Once Upon a Mattress*, a musical comedy starring Carol Burnett that opened in 1959.⁹⁵ She remained active on Broadway in the 1960s and 1970s.⁹⁶

Actor’s Equity Association ruled in 1949 that its union members could perform in off-Broadway theaters, playhouses began to flourish, costs and ticket prices rose, and by

⁹² Accessed July 21, 2018, <http://www.juliemandel.com/works/>.

⁹³ Cryer played the small role of Mrs. Kepplewhite. Perhaps the success of Leigh, who was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Original Score for her lyrics set by Cy Coleman, served as a source of inspiration for Cryer, an aspiring bookwriter-lyricist.

⁹⁴ Accessed September 25, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/carolyn-leigh-13033/#awards>. Leigh was nominated for two Tony Awards for Best Original Score for *Little Me*, and *How Now, Dow Jones* (with music by Bernstein).

⁹⁵ Accessed July 26, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-show/once-upon-a-mattress-6761>.

⁹⁶ Accessed July 26, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/mary-rodgers-12308/#awards>. Rodgers received a Tony Award nomination for her music for *Once Upon A Mattress*, and another for Best Original Score for *Working* in 1978.

the end of the 1950s, there were around forty venues, and approximately one hundred productions in a season. By the decade's end, musicals were becoming longer-running hits, and new composer-lyricist talent flourished. Thomas S. Hischak describes how off-Broadway distinguished itself from Broadway, offering "musicals that were often more demanding and not so worried about being appealing . . . that replaced spectacle with cleverness, belly laughs with wit, stars with promising newcomers, and popularity with bravado." He notes that small-scale musical revues, with their highly satiric material, proliferated, and that the creators of the revues and musicals defied Broadway, and viewed it as "too conventional, too predictable, and way too safe."⁹⁷

The 1960s

The Broadway and off-Broadway musicals of the 1960s bring several new, and today unrecognized, female musical creators.⁹⁸ While theater aficionados may be familiar with Cryer and Ford, the others have disappeared from theater discussion, although their contributions were fresh and distinctive. Cryer and Ford enter the New York scene in 1967, and the debut of their first musical establishes Ford as one of the first women to compose professional musical theater scores. Their small-scale, socially conscious works befitted the off-Broadway stage.

Now Is the Time appears to be the sole book musical that focuses on the Vietnam War. Cryer's husband played the main character, a conscientious objector who takes a teaching job in a small Indiana town. The plot narrates how his presence in the

⁹⁷ Hischak, *Off-Broadway Musicals Since 1919*, 43-44.

⁹⁸ Appendix 1 includes works by five composers: Marguerite Monnot, Naomi Caryl Hirshhorn, Marian Grudeff, and Cryer and Ford.

community affects a female music teacher, performed by Cryer, and a young male student. The plot and characters of the show and Cryer and Ford's other New York musicals are discussed in detail in the following two chapters.⁹⁹

The Vietnam conflict is the subject of a show by bookwriter Megan Terry and composer and lyricist Marianne de Pury. Hischak singles out their 1966 anti-war play, *Viet Rock*, as “perhaps the first rock musical.” He calls *Viet Rock* an “embryonic version” of the 1967 musical, *Hair*, although the show is a play with music added, and therefore is not included in Appendix 1.¹⁰⁰ A year later, *Hair* registered its historical relevance by offering an alternative form in musical theater. Prior to *Hair*'s opening, musical theater typically presented “book musicals” that consist of a strong story (in a script or “book”) that is carefully integrated with musical numbers, incidental music, and often dance. Although Hischak argues that the aftereffects of *Hair* are overestimated, and that most musical theater did not abandon traditional forms and turn to rock, he dubs *Hair* “antimusical theatre” based on its nearly plotless book that altered the story-telling tactics of book musicals, and the centrality of the songs. *Hair* furthermore shifted the element of natural sound through the performers' use of hand held mics, and a rock concert style of delivery.¹⁰¹

Cryer and Ford's musical, *Now Is the Time*, is significant for its exclusively female production team that occupied positions traditionally held by men. Ford comments, “I don't think we gave a single thought to the fact that the production team

⁹⁹ Chapter Two provides personal and professional biographical details. Chapter Three provides production and reception details, and my interpretations on the books, lyrics, and music of four of Cryer and Ford's New York shows.

¹⁰⁰ Hischak, *Off-Broadway Musicals Since 1919*, 94.

¹⁰¹ Hischak, *Off-Broadway Musicals Since 1919*, 97-98.

was all women. . . . We were never aware that we weren't supposed to be able to do these things, fortunately. . . . I'm sure Word [Baker, the director] didn't set out to have an all-women team; he just knew those people and chose a team."¹⁰² A weekly industry newspaper, *Show Business*, did notice the production staff, and wrote that the show was "loaded with women":

The book and lyrics are by Gretchen Cryer, David's wife, and the music is by Nancy Ford. The costumes, scenery and lighting are being designed by Jeanne Button, Holly Hass and Carol Rubenstein. The production assistant is Eleanor McCann, the property woman (usually a man) is Patricia Walker, and the Theatre de Lys . . . is owned by Lucille Lortel.¹⁰³

The reference to Cryer as "David's wife," and the addition of the phrase "usually a man," call attention to sexist thinking in the late 1960s.

An early example of musical creators as performers of their own music comes from singer Naomi Caryl Hirshhorn in 1963. Hirshhorn composed the music for Charles Aidman's lyrics, and the collaborators performed in the Broadway musical, *Spoon River Anthology*, a dramatic reading of the verse of Edgar Lee Masters in which ghosts tell their stories and secrets in a small town cemetery.¹⁰⁴ Cryer and Ford performed in their own and other musicals throughout the years, and several of the female musical writers this chapter explores began their careers as actors and/or singers, as noted throughout the discussion.

¹⁰² Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford, interview by author, June 26, 2018, New York, audio recording.

¹⁰³ Nancy Ford, scrapbook materials, accessed June 30, 2018, *Show Business*, July 31, 1967.

¹⁰⁴ Accessed July 21, 2018, <https://www.samuel french.com/s/2775/spoon-river-anthology>.

The 1970s

Broadway musicals in the 1970s took several paths to draw in audiences and provide large-scale theatrical entertainment. Stephen Sondheim dominated theater writing with five new musicals; escapist musicals provided amusement for theatergoers; many classic musicals held revivals; African-American musical productions surged; and one rock musical, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, brought a concept album to the stage. Off-Broadway theaters, on the other hand, tackled the issues that lingered on after the tumult of the 1960s. The previously popular musical revues faded away, and social issues such as the women's movement, civil rights, and homosexual lifestyles became topics for shows. Broadway and off Broadway saw a decline in the number of productions in the 1970s, due to New York's loss of tourism and the rise of production costs, and off-Broadway shows began to aim for Broadway transfers to gain more recognition and stay alive.¹⁰⁵

Women contributed to musicals that explored topics such as feminism, urbanization, and the black experience expressed by African-American musical creators and performers. Cryer and Ford's first two 1970s musicals, *Isaac* and *Shelter*, explored interpersonal problems related to rapidly advancing technology. In *I'm Getting My Act Together*, they brought singer-songwriter traditions to the theatrical stage, and used it to voice many issues women faced in the era of "Women's Lib." Cryer and Ford, Micki Grant, Elizabeth Swados, and others remain agents of change in female musical theater history for reasons discussed below.

¹⁰⁵ Hirschak, *Off-Broadway Musicals Since 1919*, 109-10.

Cryer and Ford's female characters grow more assertive and even unruly over the course of their four New York musicals from 1967 through 1978, although Cryer typically incorporates humor in her dialogue to temper the emotions of the characters, and foster the audience's receptivity to her themes regarding communication and self-expression. Their off-Broadway musical, *Isaac*, opened in 1970, and received positive reviews and numerous awards. Their only Broadway production, *Shelter*, opened in 1973, and ran for just a month. Although one succeeded and one failed, both shows featured male protagonists who create distorted realities using media devices such as a tape recorder, camera, and computer. The men's preoccupation with technological distractions precludes truthful communication in their relationships with women. A careful reading of the books reveals that the main female characters in both musicals emerge as the seekers of truthful relationships and are the victors by the shows' conclusions (see Chapter Three).

Musical theater literature frequently claims Cryer and Ford's 1978 musical, *I'm Getting My Act Together*, as the first feminist musical. In 1973, however, their musical, *Shelter*, caught the attention of newspaper critics who realized that Cryer and Ford were bringing a woman's point of view to musical theater, even though they did not label themselves or their shows as "feminist." New Jersey drama critic Emory Lewis wrote that *Shelter* was the first Broadway musical with women exclusively creating the dialogue, music, and lyrics. In Lewis's article, Cryer's comments begin to express feminist sentiments, including a rejection of the belief that women should strive to get married, which she called a "false and degrading idea." Cryer continued: "Marriage is overplayed

in our culture, and the feminists have been vital in subtly changing our minds.”¹⁰⁶ Ford told *Daily News* writer, Ricki Fulman, “We both agree with the women’s movement, although we’re too busy to be active in it. But we’re certainly not anti-men.”¹⁰⁷ When *Shelter* showed signs of struggle on Broadway, *New York Post* writer, Frances Herridge interviewed Cryer, who provided details of the plot, characters, and meaning of the title, and speculated on why some male critics rejected the show:

It satirizes the man who likes the image of himself as husband and father, but actually isolates himself from his family. . . . [The character Michael] has his wife in the background. He has his regular mistress—he likes to pretend she is his cleaning woman or helper because morally it makes their relationship more acceptable. . . . In the end he’s happiest alone in his special shelter when he can construct any world that pleases him.¹⁰⁸

Michael’s choice to be in control rather than commit to a conscious relationship, and his indifference to the loss of the women in his life reflect Cryer’s concern over the growing alienation between men and women in 1970s. The critics may have overlooked Cryer’s message, as they pondered why Michael had been abandoned.

William A. Raidy got it right when he called Cryer and Ford “two young ladies so far out front in the women’s lib parade they don’t even know it.” He quoted Cryer as saying: “We’re sort of ‘do it yourself’ liberationists. We feel women should work hard at their professions, even if they’re ones traditionally male.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Ford, scrapbook materials, Emory Lewis, “Women make theater history,” *The Sunday Record*, January 28, 1973.

¹⁰⁷ Ford, scrapbook materials, Ricki Fulman, “This harmonious pair say it with music,” *Daily News*, February 2, 1973.

¹⁰⁸ Ford, scrapbook materials, Frances Herridge, “Creators Fight to Save ‘Shelter,’” *New York Post*, February 10, 1973.

¹⁰⁹ Ford, scrapbook materials, William A. Raidy, “2 Little girls from DePauw,” *Long Island Sunday Advance*, March 4, 1973.

After *Shelter*'s run ended, Cryer and Ford turned their focus toward composing in a singer-songwriter style that led to two RCA albums, and a cabaret act to promote their music in New York clubs and on tour. Many of the songs they wrote directly related to their personal experiences at the time, and led to their 1978 musical, *I'm Getting My Act Together*. The show eventually played in many national and international theaters. Cryer and Ford performed in the show, with Cryer originating the lead role and Ford stepping in when Cryer played the role in Chicago.

Cryer admits, "[The show] got labeled feminist, which was really crazy, because before I had written this show, I hadn't even noticed the feminist movement very much. . . . I've carried that label ever since. Indeed I am a feminist, but that wasn't my initial idea in writing that."¹¹⁰ Cryer surmises that her feminist leanings began when she read Simone de Beauvoir's book, *The Second Sex* (1949), at age nineteen.¹¹¹ Her 1950s upbringing, however, influenced her decision to marry shortly after college graduation (see Chapter Two). By the time she wrote *I'm Getting My Act Together*, Cryer was divorced, and working hard to balance her life as a single parent of two and an increasingly busy career and hit show in which she played the lead. The feminist community, however, picked up on the messages that the show conveyed. Even Cryer and Ford's heterosexuality was challenged, and Cryer recalls a Wednesday night post-show discussion when she felt a female audience member inferred a lesbian relationship between herself and Ford by asking why they were not writing about women's relationships with women. Cryer relates, "I told her that a) I am heterosexual; and b) my

¹¹⁰ Turan and Papp, "I'm Getting My Act Together," 455.

¹¹¹ Kasha and Hirschhorn, "Gretchen Cryer," 80.

concern has to do with sexual politics, with the relationships of men and women.”¹¹² Ford explains that she did not understand the show’s feminist label at the time: “We thought it was about relationships between men and women, and that it was specifically about a woman and from her standpoint.”¹¹³ Nevertheless, putting their autobiographical experiences on stage was their first foray into strongly feminist subject matter, and it would remain an important and explicit element in much of their subsequent work.

When *I’m Getting My Act Together* debuted, many critics jumped on “feminism” as its theme, and used it to define the show. One review title suggested, “Feminist musical comes on ‘strong’,” likely a reference to the song, “Strong Woman Number,” in the show. The article’s writer called the character of Heather “definitely a way out front women’s libber” who “doesn’t mind looking her age.”¹¹⁴ A few critics did not understand the playful humor or the message relating to the challenges women and men were experiencing in the transitional time of second-wave feminism. *New York Times* critic Richard Eder wrote: “[Cryer] falls into platitude after platitude and comes up with a show that is both insubstantial and very heavy. . . . Self-celebration is the affliction of ‘I’m Getting My Act Together’.”¹¹⁵ Allan Wallach of *Newsday* titled his review, “Cryer, Ford Show a Polemic with Music,” and called the musical a “heavy-handed metaphor for the

¹¹² Cryer, interview by Betsko and Koenig, 101.

¹¹³ Nancy Ford, Oral History, May 27, 1987, interview by Kenneth Turan, New York Public Library, Performing Arts Research Collections.

¹¹⁴ Ford, scrapbook materials, William A. Raidy, “Feminist musical comes on ‘strong’,” *The Star Ledger* (Newark, NJ), June 19, 1978.

¹¹⁵ Ford, scrapbook materials, Richard Eder, “Stage: ‘Getting Act Together’,” *New York Times*, June 15, 1978.

birth of the New Woman.”¹¹⁶ Walter Kerr, in the *New York Times*, labeled himself a “natural male chauvinist,” who was “endlessly fascinated by the varied cases the more ardent women’s libbers make for themselves.” He said Cryer was making the “wrong one—or making it wrongly,” and added that she was issuing a “fretfully defiant challenge.”¹¹⁷

A few female writers were willing to ask Cryer for information. An article in a newspaper from Ford’s hometown of Kalamazoo quoted Cryer and Ford about the show’s themes. Cryer explained that the title was “a metaphor for a woman who is trying to get her life together. It is a feminist musical but it deals with men’s problems as well—with men who feel threatened and confused.” She admitted that the show was autobiographical in some respects but added, “Something of yourself is in everything you write.” Ford commented, “I think women now know they can be complete persons on their own. They don’t need a man to be a complete person.”¹¹⁸ Judy Barnett offered a sympathetic perspective, and noted in *Entertainment West*, “Ms. Cryer is not the kind of feminist who degrades men in order to prove her equality or express her creativity.”¹¹⁹ In 1980, when Cryer played the role of Heather in *Chicago*, Carol Kleiman quoted Cryer,

¹¹⁶ Ford, scrapbook materials, Allan Wallach, “Theater: Cryer, Ford show a polemic with music,” *Newsday*, June 15, 1978.

¹¹⁷ Ford, scrapbook materials, Walter Kerr, “Stage View: Two Women, Both Alone, Two Moods,” *New York Times*, July 9, 1978.

¹¹⁸ Ford, scrapbook materials, Rebecca Morehouse, “They got their act together,” *Kalamazoo Gazette*, July 2, 1978.

¹¹⁹ Ford, scrapbook materials, Judy Barnett, “Gretchen Cryer: Getting Her Act Together,” *Entertainment West*, November 15-December 15, 1978.

who expressed her misgivings over the feminist label: “If a man had written it, critics would not say it was masculinist. They would say it was universal.”¹²⁰

Ford considered the show “very life affirming for a lot of women,” and felt many women identified with Heather, and left the theater with the message, “You can do it. Go on. It’s tough. We know it’s tough, and there’s a lot of pain involved, but ultimately there’s a triumph too.” Ford believes that men identified with the character of Heather as well, because men also have to deal with “stereotypical ideas about what makes a successful person.”¹²¹

In actuality, *I’m Getting My Act Together* is not the first musical to tackle feminist issues. Elizabeth Wollman provides a detailed account of the 1970 off-Broadway musical, *Mod Donna*, which preceded Cryer and Ford’s far more amiable exploration of sexism. Wollman surmises that *Mod Donna*, also composed by a female writer and composer, did not appeal to critics and audiences due to its “messy, angry manifestation of what was received—often with impatience, derision, or downright hostility—as a messy, angry movement.”¹²² Cryer and Ford’s musical incorporated humor, entertaining dialogue and music, and a hopeful ending to keep the audience engaged.

Along with Cryer and Ford, Eve Merriam, Micki Grant, and Elizabeth Swados are significant musical theater writers due to their political themes, diverse musical styles, and award-winning productions. All three women have withstood the test of time, with recent revivals of one or more of their works.

¹²⁰ Ford, scrapbook materials, Carol Kleiman, “Tempo: No need to cry for Gretchen—she is all together now on the road,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 10, 1980.

¹²¹ Ford, Oral History.

¹²² Wollman, “*Mod Donna*,” 107-108.

Eve Merriam's controversial collection of poems, *The Inner City Mother Goose*, provided material for her book for the 1971 musical, *Inner City*. Tom O'Horgan, the director for *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, conceived the idea for the show, and Helen Miller composed the music.¹²³ The classic nursery rhymes were suffused with social protest attitudes, and Merriam subtitled the revue, "A Street Cantata," to represent "a celebration of urban life as seen through the eyes of its ghetto citizens."¹²⁴ The show had a Broadway run, and a concert version was held at a Manhattan supper club, Feinstein's/54 Below, in 2017.¹²⁵ In 1976, Merriam wrote the book and Alexandra Ivanoff wrote the musical arrangements for the off-Broadway show, *The Club*. Publisher Samuel French offers a concise description: "Members of a stuffy, all male club, circa 1905, tap dance and sing fourteen songs of the era, all indicative of male smugness and superiority."¹²⁶ The show had a successful run of 674 performances, and included a cast of seven women in drag who played the club's workers and members. They performed entertaining song-and-dance numbers and told sexist jokes that were, at the same time, satirizing men and patriarchal thinking.¹²⁷ Wollman writes that *The Club* "demonstrates how unattractive imbalances in sexual (and class-and-race-based) power can be."¹²⁸ She

¹²³ Accessed August 6, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/inner-city-3629/#opennightcredit>.

¹²⁴ Accessed August 6, 2018, <https://masterworksbroadway.com/music/inner-city-1971/>.

¹²⁵ Accessed August 6, 2018, <https://www.broadwayworld.com/board/readmessage.php?thread=1103094>.

¹²⁶ Accessed August 6, 2018, <https://www.samuel french.com/p/7382/the-club>.

¹²⁷ Accessed August 6, 2018, <http://www.lortel.org/Archives/Production/2633>.

¹²⁸ Wollman, "Not-So-Angry Feminist Musicals," 114. Wollman provides a thorough account of the production and its critical reception in her chapter.

places *The Club* alongside *I'm Getting My Act Together* as one of the two “not-so-angry feminist musicals.”

African-American Micki Grant is a composer, bookwriter/lyricist, and performer who created three successful Broadway shows in the 1970s.¹²⁹ Tepper writes that Grant explored black issues such as prejudice, poverty, lack of educational opportunities, and women's concerns.¹³⁰ Grant performed in, composed the score, and wrote the book for the acclaimed 1972 musical revue, *Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope*.¹³¹ A 2018 revival of the show took place at off Broadway's Encores! Off-Center. Theater writer Eric Grode notes that the musical made history on Broadway with Grant as the first woman to write both the music and lyrics for a Broadway musical, and her collaborator, Vinnette Carroll, as the first African-American woman to direct on Broadway. Grode describes how the original show “used gospel, calypso, spoken-word, rock, jazz, soul and even rudimentary hip-hop music to discuss everything from slumlords to feminism to numbers rackets.” He quotes Grant, who recalls: “I was just writing about my community—about what I saw on the news and on the streets and in the church.” The revival takes political references into account, and Grant stated: “I've got to take a look at it again. If nothing else, I've got to get Obama in there somewhere.”¹³² Grant also contributed five songs to another

¹²⁹ Accessed July 28, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/micki-grant-7760>.

¹³⁰ Tepper, “10 Musicals By Women.”

¹³¹ Accessed July 28, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/dont-bother-me-i-cant-cope-3533/#opennightcredit>. Grant received Tony Award nominations for Best Book of a Musical, and Best Original Score, and won Drama Desk Awards for Outstanding Performance, and Most Promising Lyricist.

¹³² Eric Grode, “A Buoyant '70s Musical About Black Lives Lands in 2018,” *New York Times*, July 20, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/20/theater/dont-bother-me-i-cant-cope-savion-glover-encores.html?action=click&module=MoreInSection&pgtype=Article®ion=Footer&contentCollection=Theater>. Grode describes Encores! Off-Center as an “annual tribute to smaller-scale and Off Broadway musicals.” The article quotes Jeanine Tesori, artistic co-director of Encores! Off-Center, who explains that

successful musical, *Your Arms Too Short To Box With God*. The 1976 show, billed as “A Soaring Celebration in Song and Dance,” received two revivals in 1980 and 1982.¹³³

Elizabeth Swados was arguably the most innovative and versatile woman to bring her ideas to the stage in the 1970s. For her 1978 off-Broadway musical, *Runaways*, Swados wrote the book, music, and lyrics, directed and choreographed the work, and played guitar in the show’s band. The show moved to Broadway later that year.¹³⁴ Tepper describes how Swados came to producer Joseph Papp (also the producer for Cryer and Ford’s *I’m Getting My Act Together*) with the idea of interviewing actual runaway children to create a theater piece. Tepper writes that the show “took an uncompromising look at urban youth,” notes that three of the children in the show were actual runaways, and says the show was notable for its inclusion regarding race and socioeconomic background, and that a deaf child actor used American Sign Language to deliver his songs.¹³⁵

Alongside this strikingly innovative work, Swados brought many other talents to her liberal off-Broadway projects. From 1977 through 2014, her works reveal her diverse talents as a music composer and adaptor, bookwriter, lyricist, director, conductor, and actor.¹³⁶ Hischak notes that in the 1977 show, *Nightclub Cantata*, Swados wrote much of the music and lyrics, and also borrowed words from authors including Sylvia Plath,

one goal is to “reveal what the legacy is.” Tesori, discussed below, notes, “Micki and Vinnette were inserting hip-hop and spoken-word into musical theater decades before many other people were.”

¹³³ Accessed July 28, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/your-arms-too-short-to-box-with-god-3884/#songs>. Song titles include “Beatitudes,” “We’re Gonna Have a Good Time,” “We Are the Priests and Elders,” “Something is Wrong in Jerusalem,” and “It’s Too Late.”

¹³⁴ Accessed July 29, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/runaways-4060>.

¹³⁵ Tepper, “10 Musicals By Women.”

¹³⁶ Accessed July 29, 2018, <http://www.lortel.org/Archives/CreditableEntity/2236>.

Carson McCullers, and Muriel Rukseyer. She wrote sketches fashioning the material together, directed, and appeared in the cast. Hischak describes songs that “bordered on rock but often relied heavily on folk and blues,” and messages that ranged from tender to farcical.¹³⁷ Although the Vietnam War was over, plays and musicals about the conflict and its aftermath, such as Swados’s *Dispatches*, continued to appear. Richard Eder’s unfavorable review is a vestige of the sexist defensiveness that came before the social consciousness of second-wave feminism:

It does not look right, in the context of this subject, to have women playing some of the soldiers. It turns it into a very different kind of war, a very different kind of feeling. It is plain blind, for example, to have a woman, dressed as a soldier, deliver the lines about not being able to spit out of sheer terror.¹³⁸

After Swados’s death in 2016, actor Diane Lane, who appeared in Swados’s productions of *Medea* and *Runaways* as a child, established a grant for female educators in Swados’s name, saying: “Liz was a catalyst in young people being heard and finding a way into expression.”¹³⁹ Two days after Swados’s death, Encores! Off Center announced a staged revival of *Runaways*. Artistic director Jeanine Tesori commented that Swados’s work deeply affected her own, and called her “a very adventurous theatermaker, unapologetic for her methods, ferocious and kind and fearless.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Hischak, *Off-Broadway Musicals Since 1919*, 138.

¹³⁸ Richard Eder, “Stage: ‘Dispatches,’ Rock-War Musical,” *New York Times*, April 19, 1979, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/04/19/archives/stage-dispatches-rockwar-musical-based-on-herr-book.html>.

¹³⁹ Eric Grode, “Meryl Streep, Diane Lane and Others on the Legacy of Elizabeth Swados,” *New York Times*, June 30, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/03/theater/meryl-streep-diane-lane-and-others-on-the-legacy-of-elizabeth-swados.html?emc=eta1>.

¹⁴⁰ Michael Paulson, “‘Runaways’ to Be Revived This Summer,” *New York Times*, January 8, 2016, <https://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/01/08/runaways-to-be-revived-this-summer/?emc=eta1>.

A glance at the musical, *Working*, seems a fitting conclusion to my account of female composers in the 1970s, since it contains several songs written by and about women in society. The 1978 revue featured songs from Micki Grant, collaborators Mary Rodgers and Susan Birkenhead, and Graciela Daniele, in addition to others from singer-songwriter James Taylor and musical theater creators Stephen Schwartz and Craig Carnelia. Grant composed the music and lyrics for “Cleanin’ Women,” “If I Could’ve Been,” and “Lovin’ Al.” Rodgers (music) and Birkenhead (lyrics) composed “Nobody Tells Me How,” and Daniele wrote the Spanish lyrics to James Taylor’s “Un Mejor Dia Vendra.”¹⁴¹ The bookwriters, Schwartz and Nina Faso, based the musical on Studs Terkel’s book, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (1974). In 2012, an off-Broadway revival updated the book to “acknowledge changes in working conditions and high unemployment.” Theater reviewer David Rooney singles out two songs that capture the situations of two female characters in the musical: Rodgers and Birkenhead’s song, “Nobody Tells Me How,” finds a veteran schoolteacher wondering how her methods became so ill-suited to today’s unruly, overpopulated classrooms; and Grant’s “Cleanin’ Women” presents a mother who hopes her daughter will break the family tradition of domestic work.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Accessed July 28, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/working-4061/#songs>.

¹⁴² David Rooney, “It’s Not Just a Job; It’s a Musical,” *New York Times*, December 18, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/19/theater/reviews/studs-terkels-working-is-recycled-again-for-the-stage.html>.

The 1980s

A diversity of popular musical styles and theatrical forms continues to appear in the 1980s, although no female writers or composers gain recognition. Stacy Wolf calls the 1980s “the decade of anti-feminist backlash,” and describes how two Broadway blockbusters, *Les Misérables* (1987) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1988), turn their backs on feminism, and “converse with 1980s culture that sought to diminish the significance of women as social and political actors.”¹⁴³

A survey of female-created musicals on and off-Broadway confirms Wolf’s argument, and shifts the focus from socially themed musicals to new musical styles and more innocuous entertainment. Renowned singer-songwriter Carole King tried her hand at musical theater composition, writing music for children’s fiction author Maurice Sendak’s *Really Rosie*, based on his book *Pierre* from his *Chicken Soup with Rice* series (see Chapter Three). A country-and-western spoof, *Pump Boys and Dinettes*, is an unusual success story from the decade. For the show, a country music entertainment group of the same name transformed itself into a theater piece that opened off Broadway in 1981, and transferred to Broadway the following year.¹⁴⁴ Cass Morgan and Debra Monk (the “Dinettes”) composed six of the show’s country rock songs, and joined four men (the “Pump Boys”) onstage.¹⁴⁵ Theater commentators for two revivals in the past

¹⁴³ Wolf, *Changed for Good*, 129.

¹⁴⁴ Accessed July 31, 2018, <http://www.lortel.org/Archives/Production/2159>.

¹⁴⁵ Accessed July 31, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/pump-boys-and-dinettes-4161/#songs>. Morgan composed “Sister” and “No Holds Barred,” Monk and Morgan composed “Menu Song” and “Tips,” and both contributed to “Caution: Men Cooking” and “Drinkin’ Shoes.”

decade noted that the original production was one of the first Broadway musicals to incorporate popular music that was composed by the actor-musicians themselves.¹⁴⁶

The first theater to directly focus on female artists, founded in 1978, grew more influential during the 1980s.¹⁴⁷ WP Theater (initially called the Women's Project Theater) calls the 1983 musical, *A . . . My Name is Alice*, one of their most heralded productions. Julianne Boyd and Joan Micklin Silver conceived and directed the revue of songs and sketches.¹⁴⁸ Tepper describes how *A . . . My Name is Alice* celebrated contemporary women, "juxtaposing the humorous with the pointed, revealing and political." Noting that women of color comprised half of the cast, Tepper adds that the topics included were equally diverse.¹⁴⁹

The late 1980s birthed the career of the very successful lyricist and bookwriter Lynn Ahrens, who has maintained a vigorous schedule writing both off-Broadway and Broadway productions. Off Broadway, Ahrens participated in seven musicals and received five nominations for her work.¹⁵⁰ Broadway credits begin with the transfer of *Once on This Island* in 1990, and her collaboration with composer Stephen Flaherty since

¹⁴⁶ Andrew Gans, "Original Cast of *Pump Boys and Dinettes* Reunite for July 22 Concerts," July 22, 2018, accessed July 31, 2018, <http://www.playbill.com/article/original-cast-of-pump-boys-and-dinettes-reunite-for-july-22-concerts>.

¹⁴⁷ Accessed July 31, 2018, <http://wptheater.org/about/mission/>. In 1978, producer Julia Miles created the Women's Project Theater, where women pursued both compositional and performance projects. Now forty years old, the WP Theater calls itself the "nation's oldest and largest theater company dedicated to developing, producing and promoting the work of female-identified and trans theater artists at every stage of their careers," and "leaders of a global movement towards gender parity."

¹⁴⁸ Accessed July 31, 2018, http://www.guidetomusicaltheatre.com/shows_a/a-mynameisalice.html. Winnie Holzman, Marta Kauffman, and Anne Meara wrote the music and scenes. Susan Birkenhead, Maggie Bloomfield, Carol Hall, Cheryl Hardwick, Georgia Bogardus Holot, Amanda McBroom, Cassandra Medley, Susan Rice, June Siegel, and Lucy Simon were additional contributors.

¹⁴⁹ Tepper, "10 Musicals By Women."

¹⁵⁰ Accessed July 19, 2018, <http://www.lortel.org/Archives/CreditableEntity/9909>.

1988 has earned them theater, film and music's highest honors.¹⁵¹ Ahrens is the epitome of a successful female musical theater lyricist who has worked steadily during the last two decades, and who has two musicals on Broadway in 2018.¹⁵²

The 1990s

Many of the musicals of the 1990s feature strong female protagonists and explore the lives of young and teenage girls. At the end of the decade, Cryer and Ford were fully engaged in writing musical revues for the large retail company, American Girl. In 1998, they composed their first musical, *The American Girls Revue*, and in 2001, a second musical, *Circle of Friends: An American Girls Musical*. In 2007, Cryer and Ford wrote and composed an off-Broadway adaptation of the novel, *Anne of Green Gables*, again focusing on a young female protagonist. As one of the first female compositional teams on and off Broadway, they set an example for another female songwriting team in the industry, Zina Goldrich and Marcy Heisler, discussed below.

In 1991, *The Secret Garden* became the first musical created by an all-female creative writing team on Broadway.¹⁵³ Singer-songwriter Lucy Simon, sister of Carly Simon, composed the music, and Marsha Norman wrote the book and lyrics for the adaptation of the children's novel, which musicalizes the story of a ten-year-old orphan, Mary Lennox, and her healing process that unfolds in a garden. Norman, a playwright,

¹⁵¹ Accessed July 19, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/lynn-ahrens-7450>.

¹⁵² Accessed August 5, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/lynn-ahrens-7450/#awards>. Ahrens won a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Lyrics and shared a Tony Award for Best Original Musical Score for *Ragtime*.

¹⁵³ Accessed August 1, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/the-secret-garden-4640/#awards>. Norman won a Tony Award for Best Book of a Musical and a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Book of a Musical, and earned other nominations for the score.

bookwriter, and lyricist, is also an activist who founded The Lilly Awards with Julia Jordan and Theresa Rebeck, and is on a quest for gender parity.¹⁵⁴ In 2016, Ben Coleman, literary supervisor for Samuel French, Inc., interviewed Norman and Simon on the twenty-fifth anniversary of *The Secret Garden*. Norman comments that the 2016 Broadway musical, *Waitress*, has the first all-female creative team since *The Secret Garden*, and believes that, for the most part, men still control the theater world. She states: “We want the stories of women to be told by women. We want to hear the voices of the whole human chorus onstage, not just the guys.”¹⁵⁵ Simon comments that a quarter of a century after their debut it is easier for a female team to come forward, but “back then that was real trailblazing.” Norman adds that they felt they were opening the door, but adds, “It is a struggle that requires to be won again and again.”¹⁵⁶

Composer Zina Goldrich and bookwriter/lyricist Marcy Heisler also wrote children’s theater works during the decade, and have three off-Broadway credits, two of which ran at the Lucille Lortel Theatre, as did Cryer and Ford’s *Anne of Green Gables*. In 1993, Goldrich and Heisler began a collaboration that continues to thrive, and they mirror Cryer and Ford in a number of ways. Goldrich, much like Ford, began her career as a

¹⁵⁴ Accessed August 16, 2018, <http://www.thelillyawards.org/about-the-lilly-awards/>. The Lilly Awards Foundation (the “Lillys,” named for pioneering playwright Lillian Hellman) is a not-for-profit organization that is “dedicated to developing and celebrating women artists by promoting gender parity at all levels of theatrical production.” They are partners with the Dramatists Guild in a national survey called “The Count” that showcases which theaters are producing the work of women, and host a Broadway cabaret fundraiser each winter and an awards ceremony each spring.

¹⁵⁵ Marsha Norman and Lucy Simon, interview with Ben Coleman, “‘Come Spirit, Come Charm’: An Interview with Marsha Norman and Lucy Simon on the 25th Anniversary of the Secret Garden,” April 25, 2016, accessed April 26, 2016, <https://www.breakingcharactermagazine.com/come-spirit-come-charm-interview-marsha-norman-lucy-simon-25th-anniversary-secret-garden/>.

¹⁵⁶ Adam Hetrick, “History-Making Women of *The Secret Garden* Reunite to Talk Breaking Ground in Musical Theatre,” January 7, 2016, accessed August 8, 2018, <http://www.playbill.com/article/history-making-women-of-the-secret-garden-reunite-to-talk-breaking-ground-in-musical-theatre-com-378010>.

show pianist. Two of her jobs included playing for rehearsals for Broadway's *Grand Hotel*, and as a replacement keyboardist and replacement assistant conductor for Broadway's *Titanic*.¹⁵⁷ In another parallel with Cryer and Ford's work in the 1970s, Heisler and Goldrich perform a two-woman revue, *The Marcy and Zina Show*. Similar to the album, "Cryer & Ford," they released an album, "Marcy & Zina: The Album," on Yellow Sound Label in 2009. Like Cryer and Ford, they are both active members of The Dramatist Guild.¹⁵⁸ In addition to many projects outside of New York City, many fans know them from their song "Taylor, the Latte Boy," featured on Kristin Chenoweth's 2005 Sony Records album, *As I Am*.¹⁵⁹ In a 2013 interview, Laura Rossi Totten questioned Heisler about her collaboration with Goldrich. Heisler's explanation of their writing process reflects Cryer and Ford's collaborative methods. She compares their process to a game of tennis where she serves the lyrics, Goldrich hits back the music, and a free for all ensues. If they have differences of opinion, they simply go back to the drawing board.¹⁶⁰

The African-American composer-lyricist-performer, Ann Duquesnay, brought the black experience to the stage. She began her theatrical career as a performer in the 1980s and early 1990s, and in 1995 co-composed the music for the off-Broadway production,

¹⁵⁷ Accessed August 2, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/zina-goldrich-453983>.

¹⁵⁸ Accessed August 2, 2018, <https://goldrichandheisler.com/about-goldrich-heisler/>.

¹⁵⁹ Accessed August 3, 2018, <http://www.lortel.org/Archives/CreditableEntity/25575>.

¹⁶⁰ Laura Rossi Totten, "Q-and-A: Writer Marcy Heisler talks about show," November 7, 2013, accessed August 3, 2018, <https://www.jamestownpress.com/articles/q-and-a-writer-marcy-heisler-talks-about-show/>.

Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk.¹⁶¹ In 1996, the show moved to Broadway, and Duquesnay is also listed as a co-lyricist, in addition to playing the roles of 'da Singer and The Chanteuse. The dance musical featured tap, and relayed black history from slavery to the present.¹⁶² Duquesnay won a Tony for Best Featured Actress in a Musical, and earned a Best Original Score nomination.¹⁶³

Much like Lynn Ahrens in the 1980s, Jeanine Tesori emerged in late 1990s, and has distinguished herself in the New York theater industry both on and off Broadway and in many capacities. Many of her musicals delve into the emotional turmoil of young female protagonists, such as the young woman in her 1997 musical, *Violet*, who suffers a traumatic facial injury and goes on a journey to meet an evangelical healer but instead discovers herself. In 2012, Tesori composed the music for the off-Broadway musical, *Fun Home*, which arrived on Broadway in 2015. Together with lyricist Lisa Kron, Tesori won a Tony Award for Best Original Score for the musical, making them the first female team to receive the honor.¹⁶⁴ Kron garnered other awards from *Fun Home*'s off-Broadway production.¹⁶⁵ Carey Purcell's *Playbill* article discusses Kron's personal connection with the show. The musical is an adaptation of Alison Bechdel's memoir that

¹⁶¹ Accessed August 2, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/ann-duquesnay-12663>. Duquesnay also performed in two additional Broadway shows: *It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues* (1999) and *Hot Feet* (2006).

¹⁶² Accessed August 2, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/bring-in-da-noise-bring-in-da-funk-4789/#opennightcredit>.

¹⁶³ Accessed August 2, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/bring-in-da-noise-bring-in-da-funk-4789/#awards>.

¹⁶⁴ Accessed August 5, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/jeanine-tesori-12488#awards>. Tesori has received prestigious awards for many of her works listed in Appendix 1.

¹⁶⁵ Accessed August 6, 2018, <http://www.lortel.org/Archives/CreditableEntity/2906>. Kron won Obie, Drama Critics Circle, and Lucille Lortelle Awards for the off-Broadway production.

concerns how her troubled relationship with her closeted father impacted her coming out as a lesbian, and marks the first time Broadway featured a lesbian protagonist. Kron, who is gay, believes the musical is “comfortable in its skin.” She explains:

I see women who can’t even picture that they don’t need to become men to be artists. There is a holistic way of women being integrated. The show has built into its DNA that sense of integration. . . . That being said, this has traditional theatre values and bones. This works as a piece of theatre. That’s what we’re interested in.¹⁶⁶

Bechdel’s comic strip, *Dykes to Watch Out For*, and its 1985 strip, “The Rule,” led to the introduction of the Bechdel test, which has become common parlance in the film and television industries. The test lists three criteria to determine whether a movie qualifies for approval: 1) it has to have at least two (named) women 2) who talk to each other 3) about something besides a man.¹⁶⁷ Theater-related websites and blogs sporadically include discussions on the Bechdel test regarding female roles for the stage.

This chapter answers, in part, the question, “Who are the female musical theater writers and composers?” New York City and the theater community are taking steps to acknowledge women’s accomplishments, and are attempting to level the playing field. My survey of women from 1907-1999 provides women’s names and their prominent Broadway and off-Broadway works, and shows how they addressed contemporary societal issues. Chief among them are Cryer and Ford, themselves advocates for women in musical theater, who mounted their first professional production off Broadway in 1967, and are still preparing musicals for production in 2018. The following chapter

¹⁶⁶ Carey Purcell, “A Woman’s World: ‘Ambition, Adventure and Exploration’ Brings *Fun Home* to Broadway . . . And Defies the Odds,” March 29, 2015, accessed August 8, 2018, <http://www.playbill.com/news/article/a-womans-world-ambition-adventure-and-exploration-brings-fun-home-to-broadway-and-defies-the-odds-345075>.

¹⁶⁷ Accessed October 29, 2018, <https://bechdeltest.com>.

details their professional and personal lives, and explains the circumstances that have made their lengthy collaboration extraordinary.

CHAPTER TWO: “CHANGING”

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS IN WRITING AND PERFORMANCE

This chapter chronicles Cryer and Ford’s collaborative work for musical theater, and their career as singer-songwriters in cabarets and as recording artists. In my quest to add to the biography of female writers and composers of musicals, Cryer and Ford’s lengthy career and abundance of works provide a strong starting point. Combining their biographies with professional commentary provides a more complete understanding of their works. These details bring to light the people and circumstances that enabled them to forge a path in a field where women are a rarity. From early childhood forward, Cryer’s and Ford’s respective role models, many female, empowered them to pursue their goals to create musical theater. Their experiences taught them self-reliance, and their collaboration offered mutual support that has greatly assisted their productivity since the 1950s. Cryer’s and Ford’s frank interviews reveal their thoughts and feelings about personal and professional choices, and aid my understanding of why themes of female independence and personal strength are a constant in their shows.

Childhood

Cryer and Ford’s earliest biographical details reveal their innate theatrical interests and imaginations, as well as the similarities in their backgrounds. Both were born in Midwestern states in 1935: Nancy Louise Ford on October 1, and Gretchen Kiger on October 17.¹⁶⁸ Both displayed an early interest in what would become their life work.

¹⁶⁸ Cryer and Ford, interview by author. Ford is the daughter of Henry Ford III and Mildred Wotring. Cryer is the daughter of Earl William "Bill" Kiger, Jr. and Louise Geraldine Niven.

Ford showed a proclivity for music from her childhood days in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Her mother was the director of the Kalamazoo Choral Society for over twenty-five years, and was involved in other musical organizations.¹⁶⁹ Ford seemingly emulated her mother as a choral director; at age five, she assembled and directed a glee club of girls from her neighborhood, and put on concerts for parents and friends.¹⁷⁰ Ford also studied piano from the age of five. She credits her musical development primarily to ten years of study (from age eight to eighteen) with piano teacher, Frances Clark, a renowned pianist, pedagogue, and author of piano method books who was teaching at Kalamazoo College at the time. Ford comments that, as a child, she envisioned careers both onstage and behind the scenes that included becoming a concert pianist, an opera singer, a writer and producer of radio shows, and a musical comedy star. Mary Martin and Richard Rodgers were chief among her role models.¹⁷¹

Cryer grew up in the country outside of Dunreith, Indiana, a town of around 200 people.¹⁷² Her father, an avid singer, added his deep bass voice to a United Methodist Church choir for fifty years, and sang for hundreds of weddings and funerals.¹⁷³ Although never exposed to cultural events or theater as a child, Cryer began to write plays that she

¹⁶⁹ Accessed January 15, 2018, <https://www.ancestry.com/boards/localities.northam.usa.states.michigan.counties.kalamazoo/21065/mb.ashx>.

¹⁷⁰ Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford, "Gretchen Cryer & Nancy Ford with Georgia Stitt," interview by Georgia Stitt, Dramatists Guild Foundation, The Legacy Project: Volume III, published on December 6, 2016, accessed December 31, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5c0PGzYBPtw>.

¹⁷¹ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

¹⁷² Dunreith, Indiana's population count is 177 in the 2010 United States census.

¹⁷³ Accessed January 15, 2018, http://thebanneronline.com/archive_obits/2004/sep.htm, published September 8, 2004.

and her brother performed indoors for their family during the long winter months.¹⁷⁴ At age five, she created and starred in her first play, *The King and the Fairy*, dancing and singing around her two-year-old brother.¹⁷⁵

Both Cryer and Ford grew up singing in their respective Methodist church choirs. The musical influences of Ford's mother and Cryer's father, together with their own early performance experiences in church, found their way into their earliest professional works, which included hymn-like songs and gospel music.¹⁷⁶

The DePauw Years

During their four years as college students, Cryer and Ford developed a personal friendship and initiated a creative relationship that launched them on a collaboration that produced two college musicals and continued to thrive after graduation. They met in 1953 during their freshman year at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana. Both Cryer and Ford have expressed gratitude for the positive support DePauw provided.¹⁷⁷ Ford majored in music and minored in speech, while Cryer majored in English literature with a minor in philosophy, and took a few music courses.¹⁷⁸ At that time, Cryer had never seen a musical, and Ford had seen only road company productions of *Oklahoma!*

¹⁷⁴ Sebesta, "Social Consciousness," 201.

¹⁷⁵ Cryer and Ford, "Performance and Storytelling Session."

¹⁷⁶ Cryer and Ford, "Performance and Storytelling Session."

¹⁷⁷ Gretchen Cryer, Oral History, June 3, 1987, interview by Kenneth Turan, New York Public Library, Performing Arts Research Collections.

¹⁷⁸ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

and *South Pacific*.¹⁷⁹ Both took summer stock jobs as performers with the Iroquois Amphitheater in Louisville, Kentucky in the summer of 1955, and Cryer spent several subsequent summers at theaters in Cohasset, Massachusetts, and Sacandaga, New York.¹⁸⁰ She considers the experience of performing in many musical productions an invaluable part of her theatrical education. The musicals from the thirties, forties, and fifties taught her play structures, and after five or six years of performing them, she says, “They were in my bones.”¹⁸¹

Cryer and Ford’s collaboration began in their sophomore year when their theatrical inclinations led to the first of two university musicals, *For Reasons of Royalty*, selected for the school’s Monon Review in 1955. Cryer recalls that Ford was writing music, and a student named David Mernitz asked them to team up with him.¹⁸² Ford initially wrote both the music and lyrics, and Cryer collaborated with Mernitz on the book. Ford recalls, “When we started writing musicals in college I definitely started feeling like I wanted to be more *behind* the scenes.”¹⁸³

Cryer makes light of their earliest theatrical effort.¹⁸⁴ The plot description, however, reveals the imagination and daring that continue to characterize Cryer and Ford’s partnership. Cryer recalls the story was “an idea about a princess from an East European country who comes to this country dressed as a man and works in a lumbering

¹⁷⁹ Cryer and Ford, “Song Is You!”

¹⁸⁰ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

¹⁸¹ Kasha and Hirschhorn, “Gretchen Cryer,” 77.

¹⁸² Cryer and Ford, interview by Stitt.

¹⁸³ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

¹⁸⁴ Kasha and Hirschhorn, “Gretchen Cryer,” 76. Cryer comments, “It was the most absurd thing. It had nothing to do with anything that I particularly felt anything about.”

place.” Ford adds, “Her country had a lot of timber and she wanted to learn timber because her father was in exile, but she knew someday she would be called upon to go back and take charge, and so it was a love versus duty story.” The princess falls in love with a lumberjack foreman and reveals her identity, but ultimately returns to her own country.¹⁸⁵ The leading role of the princess offers early evidence of female independence and personal strength, which became a recurring focus in their musicals.

Ford explains that she and Cryer had not yet learned how to “write what you know.” In their senior year of 1957, the pair wrote a second DePauw musical theater offering, *Hey, Angie!*¹⁸⁶ The character of Angie lived in a New York City tenement with her brother, for whom she cooked, cleaned, and did laundry. He controlled her life, and tried to prevent her from meeting anyone. David Cryer, who would become Cryer’s husband a year later, played the role of the young man who falls in love with Angie. Ford recalls that one of David Cryer’s songs describes Angie as a “simple, sweet, cheerful, undemanding” girl, that she was a favorite of the people on the street, and that the musical likely ended with the male friend helping Angie escape.¹⁸⁷ Cryer admits their naiveté in regard to the setting and subject matter.¹⁸⁸ The character of Angie, however, exemplifies a young woman under the thumb of a man who eventually breaks free.

¹⁸⁵ Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford, “Women in Theatre: Dialogues with Notable Women in American Theatre in Conversation with Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford,” interview by Linda Winer, The League of Professional Theatre Women, videotaped November 2006, aired May 18, 2007, accessed December 21, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7HCXiikRHto>.

¹⁸⁶ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

¹⁸⁷ Nancy Ford, email correspondence to author, September 2, 2018.

¹⁸⁸ Kasha and Hirschhorn, “Gretchen Cryer,” 76. Cryer comments, “This is back in Indiana, when we were nineteen! Neither of us had ever been to a slum or to a city larger than Indianapolis at the time.”

The Pre-Professional Years

Cryer and Ford both comment on their aspirations to find husbands during their college years, and the expectations of women at the time. Cryer remarks in interviews that the cultural mentality of the 1950s conditioned a young woman to aspire to the role of wife, helpmate, and supportive partner, rather than pursue her own career or way of life. In an interview with Elizabeth Wollman, Ford states, “My fantasy idea was to be a musical comedy star, but my reality idea was to get married.”¹⁸⁹ Ford married Robert (Bob) Currie, a DePauw student who had reviewed her and Cryer’s sophomore musical. Their wedding date was June 7, 1957, two days before her and Cryer’s DePauw graduation day. That fall, Ford and her husband moved to New Haven, Connecticut, where he began ministerial studies at Yale Divinity School. Cryer’s views on marriage were similar to Ford’s: “I was so powerfully a child of my culture at that time . . . that I thought the main thing I had to do in life was get attached to a man and become his helpmate and fit into his life.”¹⁹⁰ Cryer taught school in Indiana for one year, and married David Cryer on his DePauw graduation day, June 8, 1958.¹⁹¹ Despite the couple’s shared interest in theater, David Cryer’s career path also led to Yale Divinity School. Ford explains that their paths “just kept crossing,” and the couples lived in the same married dorm in New Haven.¹⁹²

The women found office jobs at the Olin Mathieson Chemical Corporation in New Haven to enable their husbands to pursue their ministerial education. In spite of

¹⁸⁹ Wollman, “Not-So-Angry Feminist Musicals,” 120.

¹⁹⁰ Kasha and Hirschhorn, “Gretchen Cryer,” 80.

¹⁹¹ I will use the full name, David Cryer, to distinguish him from Gretchen Cryer in this chapter.

¹⁹² Ford, Oral History.

working full-time, Cryer and Ford continued to pursue theater-related activities. They began collaborating on a new musical, *Rendezvous*, and acted in productions at Yale. At the time, Yale barred women from its undergraduate program, which, ironically, made it easier for women from the community to secure roles. Richard Maltby, Jr. and David Shire, now well-known musical theater collaborators, cast Cryer and Ford in their Yale musical, *Grand Tour*.¹⁹³

Cryer and Ford's husbands soon decided to abandon their divinity studies to pursue burgeoning interests in other fields, including David Cryer's attraction toward professional theater. Cryer acknowledges she never thought about what she wanted to do for herself, but his shift of interest created a convenient opportunity for her to continue her collaboration with Ford.¹⁹⁴ At the time, Ford told Cryer she did not feel that writing lyrics was her strong suit, and when she suggested bringing in a third person to write them, Cryer replied, "Oh, I'll do it," thus establishing the arrangement of Ford composing the music, and Cryer writing the book and lyrics.¹⁹⁵ Cryer has reflected on how her husband's decision affected her future: "It turned out that by trying to fit into the cracks of the man's life, I ultimately found what was very satisfying to me, but that was a lucky, lucky chance." Cryer comments on the positive outcome, and describes the love and passion she has for what she had once considered a hobby.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Cryer and Ford, interview by author. Cryer jokes that she moved up very fast at her job, from \$65 to \$68 a week, when her employers informed her, "We'd like for you to be the one who orders the pencils for the department."

¹⁹⁴ Cryer and Ford, interview by Stitt.

¹⁹⁵ Cryer and Ford, "Performance and Storytelling Session."

¹⁹⁶ Cryer, Oral History.

Their husbands' decisions necessitated a move to Boston in 1959. Ford's husband attended Harvard to pursue a PhD in English and Cryer's husband went to Boston University to get an MFA in theater.¹⁹⁷ Ford again worked as a secretary, Cryer enrolled at Harvard University, and the women continued to write together casually as a pastime. In 1960, Ford and her husband returned to DePauw University where she began courses for a master's degree in music and taught piano in the music school's preparatory department, and he taught in the English department. During the 1960-1961 school year, Ford had five piano students, and traveled during the summer of 1961 to offer workshops for piano teachers on Summy-Birchard Publishing Company's Frances Clark Piano Library.¹⁹⁸ That year, Cryer earned her Master of Arts in Teaching from Harvard, after which she taught English for a year while her husband completed his Master's degree. David Cryer directed Cryer and Ford's latest musical project, *Rendezvous*, to earn his Master of Fine Arts from Boston University in 1961.¹⁹⁹ Cryer recollects, "This show was a very romantic story about love between a college professor and a student, so we were dealing more with what we knew at that point."²⁰⁰ Ford describes the female character, Allie, as a music student who develops a crush on her married composition teacher, but remains with her boyfriend at the musical's conclusion.²⁰¹ The subject matter signals a drift away from Cryer and Ford's conservative social and religious background, and

¹⁹⁷ Ford, Oral History.

¹⁹⁸ Nancy Ford, email correspondence to author, August 28, 2018. Clark and her collaborator Louise Goss carefully crafted the workshop presentations for their instructors.

¹⁹⁹ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

²⁰⁰ Kasha and Hirschhorn, "Gretchen Cryer," 76.

²⁰¹ Nancy Ford, email correspondence to author, September 12, 2018.

reveals their growing awareness of non-conventional relationships and female independence.

Formative Years in New York

Major changes continued to develop in Cryer and Ford's personal lives. While in Greencastle, Ford and her husband decided to separate, but because they had both planned to move to New York to try to make careers in the theater, they moved there simultaneously in the fall of 1961. Although David Cryer completed his theater degree earlier that spring, he put his ambitions in the field on hold, and entered the United States Army at Fort Dix, New Jersey that year. Cryer joined Ford in the city when her husband left to fulfill his six-month military commitment.²⁰² In late 1961, she and Ford took an apartment together at 41 West 74th Street for \$130 a month, and when David Cryer arrived in the city six months later, the couple moved down the block from Ford.²⁰³

To support themselves in the city, the women initially worked as secretaries; however, within a year, both began professional theater careers.²⁰⁴ Cryer found work as a singer and actor in the choruses of two Broadway musicals, *Little Me* (1962), and *110 In The Shade* (1963), and as the standby for Abigail Adams and Martha Jefferson in *1776* (1969), covering the roles on occasion.²⁰⁵ In 1962, Ford made her professional debut as the pianist for the off-Broadway musical, *Brecht on Brecht*, and worked with the cast on their songs. In 1963, David Cryer, who played the leading role in off Broadway's *The*

²⁰² Nancy Ford, email correspondence to author, August 28, 2018.

²⁰³ Ford, Oral History.

²⁰⁴ Sebesta, "Social Consciousness," 202.

²⁰⁵ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

Fantasticks, recommended Ford as the pit pianist for the show.²⁰⁶ Ford stayed for eighteen months, and earned a positive review: “Nancy Ford at the piano, and Henry Fanelli at the harp, play as if it were opening night at Philharmonic Hall.”²⁰⁷

The job with *The Fantasticks* provided several significant connections for Cryer and Ford. The musical’s collaborators, Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt, mentored the women, helped with their first backers’ auditions, and introduced them to Word Baker, the director of *The Fantasticks*, who subsequently directed all three of Cryer and Ford’s off-Broadway musicals. Ford met actor Keith W. Charles when he joined the cast as the understudy and eventual replacement for David Cryer as El Gallo.²⁰⁸ He became Ford’s second husband on May 23, 1964.²⁰⁹

During those years, the Cryers became parents to Robin in 1963, and Jon in 1965. Today, Robin Cryer Hyland is a singer and songwriter, and Jon Cryer is an Emmy-award winning actor, famous for his role as actor Charlie Sheen’s brother Alan on the television sitcom *Two and a Half Men* (2003-2015). Shelly (sometimes spelled Shelley)

²⁰⁶ Nancy Ford, email correspondence to author, September 2, 2018. Lotte Lenya was the show’s star, and when her accompanist left, Ford’s ex-husband, who was the production stage manager, urged her to audition for the position. They pretended not to know each other during the run, to avoid being accused of nepotism.

²⁰⁷ Ford, scrapbook materials, Norman Nadel, “The Theater: ‘The Fantasticks,’ ‘Blacks’ Bridge Age Gap,” *New York World-Telegram and Sun*, May 4, 1963.

²⁰⁸ A backers’ audition is a private reading of all or part of a musical or play—with minimal accompaniment, props and costumes—for the purpose of raising the money necessary to meet the expenses of the production.

²⁰⁹ Cryer and Ford, interview by author. Ford was a secretary in the television department at the advertising agency, Benton & Bowles. She introduced Charles to a casting director for the company, who hired him as an actor for *The Edge of Night*. Charles was a professional theater, television, and film actor active from 1956-2003. He had contract roles in eight soap operas, an arena for which Ford provided scripts for twenty-four years, from 1971 through 1995. He and Ford were married until his death in 2008 from lung cancer.

Woodhouse-Collins, a make-up artist in film and television, joined them when she was fourteen. As of this writing, Cryer is a grandmother of five.²¹⁰

Cryer and Ford's Collaborative Process

Cryer and Ford each boast a diverse record of professional work, but their collaborations with each other have garnered the most critical attention. Authors Kathleen Betsko and Rachel Koenig questioned Cryer about the professional consequences of her pairing with Ford: "If you had not met Nancy Ford, do you think you'd be writing musicals?" Cryer responded: "I doubt it. If I'd written anything, it probably would've been straight plays. . . . I don't think I would have started writing lyrics. *That*, I'm sure, is directly because I knew Nancy."²¹¹ Ford has similarly expressed her gratitude toward their musical partnership, and the inspiration Cryer's ideas provide.

Cryer and Ford's collaborative process differs from the conventional approach to joint songwriting. They do not work simultaneously, in the same room. Cryer initiates the work by writing the storyline, dialogue, and song lyrics. She then presents Ford with the material, and Ford works on the musical settings. Ford then shares her settings with Cryer, and they decide if they are mutually satisfied. If there are reservations, Cryer rewrites and/or Ford makes changes in the music.²¹²

Although a composer, Ford considers the music secondary to the text: "The way I write and the kind of music I write is mainly to help the lyrics set the mood or convey the

²¹⁰ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

²¹¹ Cryer, interview by Betsko and Koenig, 105.

²¹² Cryer, interview by Betsko and Koenig, 103. "Interviewer: When you are writing the book and lyrics for a musical do you work separately from Nancy Ford, the composer? Cryer: Yes. After I finish a scene and lyrics, I give it to her. Then she works by herself."

emotions of the character. . . . The lyrics definitely come first, and I write the music to go with them, to go with the moment.” Ford’s philosophy on the collaboration between a composer and wordsmith is that there should be “strong criticism of each other’s work,” minus any tension. She describes how she and Cryer stay on their “own side of the fence,” and then meet for adjustments to the score: “We will make suggestions to one another, but the final decision on the music would rest with me and the final decision on the lyrics, the dialogue, the plot would rest with her.”²¹³

Cryer acknowledges that many songwriting teams, such as John Kander and Fred Ebb, and Betty Comden and Adolph Green, composed side by side. She and Ford found that they were able to understand each other even without verbal communication, saying they are frequently on the same wavelength.

To facilitate my own writings of the lyrics, I do have rhythms, a meter, a musical idea in mind, which I may not necessarily tell Nancy about at all. And incredibly enough, often Nancy comes up with exactly what I was thinking in my mind, as to feel and meter, but it’s always much better than I could have done myself.²¹⁴

Once the rehearsals for a project begin, Cryer and Ford continue to make adjustments to the score. At that stage, Cryer explains, “We don’t just stick to our own territory, although each of us has the final say in our particular area.” She adds that, fortunately, they “nearly always have united creative opinions.”²¹⁵

In her process for setting Cryer’s texts, Ford avoids over-thinking and analysis. When asked how she approaches a song’s musical setting, she responds that the melody,

²¹³ Carmines, Ford, and Sweet, “On Theater Music,” 158.

²¹⁴ Kasha and Hirschhorn, “Gretchen Cryer,” 79.

²¹⁵ Cryer, interview by Betsko and Koenig, 105.

harmonic progression, and rhythms often “come together at the same time, and it’s very much because of what the lyric is. The lyric sets the rhythm,” and she adapts her text settings to Cryer’s natural speech patterns. Ford concisely summarizes her process: “I write strictly character. . . . I only write from the lyric and the emotion of the character . . . those two things.”²¹⁶

Cryer and Ford’s tenacity and willingness to make necessary artistic changes are characteristic trademarks of their collaboration. They have demonstrated these traits since their first New York show, *Now Is the Time*, when they rewrote the ending after a negative critical response. Over the decades, they have altered works by combining parts of books to create new musicals, and condensed works to allow for shorter performances. They have revised their musical, *Eleanor*, many times over its forty-year history.

In March of 2018, Cleveland Institute of Music hosted a single-performance event and retrospective on Cryer and Ford’s joint career. The program’s theme of “Old Friends” denotes the important reason that the partnership endures. Ford suggests, “I think the collaboration has fed our friendship and vice versa.” Cryer adds, “We’ve always totally respected each other’s talents and relied on them.”²¹⁷

Early Stage Musicals

Cryer and Ford collaborated steadily over the years, and wrote four small-scale musicals for the New York stage by 1978. Each explores relationships between women

²¹⁶ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

²¹⁷ Bill Rudman, “Old Friends: Cryer & Ford Bring Their Amazing 63-Year Partnership to TMTP,” in *Overture*, Vol. 11, No. 3, February 2018, 3. PDF provided by Ford. *Overture* is published quarterly by the Musical Theater Project.

and men in a specific social or political context. Ford explains that off Broadway was thriving in the 1960s, and was the place to mount daring plays and musicals at a reasonable cost. At the March 2018 retrospective on the pair, Bill Rudman noted that there was no female songwriting team yet produced in New York at that time. Ford responded: “We didn’t think about that. Luckily, no one had ever told us that women weren’t supposed to be able to write musicals without a male collaborator.”²¹⁸

Cryer and Ford’s first professional musical, *Now Is the Time*, debuted off Broadway in 1967, and Cryer and her husband worked diligently to get the show into the public arena. David Cryer co-produced the show, which opened in the Theatre de Lys, in the West Village. The producers organized many backers’ auditions to earn the money, and Lucille Lortel, owner of the theater and the White Barn Theatre in Connecticut, hosted an audition that brought in over one hundred Westport summer residents as well as New York show people.²¹⁹

The Cryers took over the roles of the musical’s principal characters after the two actors previously cast had to leave the production in the final weeks of rehearsal.²²⁰ Cryer used the pseudonym Sally Niven (her mother’s surname), because as the creator of the musical she decided to avoid the risk of having the show labeled a “vanity production,”

²¹⁸ Cryer and Ford, “Song Is You!”

²¹⁹ Ford, scrapbook materials, *Show Business*, “Conn. White Barn Theater Has Backer’s Audition,” July 15, 1967.

²²⁰ Ford, scrapbook materials, Lee Silver, “‘Garden’ and ‘Family’ Advance on Schedule,” *Daily News*, August 14, 1967, names Norwegian-born Nils Hedrick as the male lead. *Sunday News*, August 27, 1967, names Dagne Crane, a soap opera actress, as the female lead.

an off-Broadway show that is financed and produced by an individual to showcase herself or himself or a relative.²²¹

Cryer's book grew out of the struggles of her brother, Pete, a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War. Pete burned his draft card, spent two years in the federal penitentiary, and subsequently participated in dozens of anti-war protests where his arrests resulted in another two years in jail.²²² Cryer confirms that the show was modeled on Pete who returned to teach in their hometown and was ostracized for being a pacifist.²²³

Cryer had begun by this time to feel overwhelmed and exhausted by the constant juggling of personal and professional demands.²²⁴ A *New York Times* article noted that the Cryers had parted in the summer of 1969, but added: "They also see each other every night at the 46th Street Theater where Gretchen, despite her basic interest in writing, earns a buck as understudy for the two female roles in '1776'."²²⁵ In June of 1970, Cryer and her husband divorced.²²⁶ That year, *The Last Sweet Days of Isaac* had a January opening, and ran through May of 1971, and Cryer and Ford experienced their first critical success.

²²¹ Ford, scrapbook materials, "1 + 1 = 1," *New York Times*, November 5, 1967. Cryer describes how she stepped into the leading role five days before the opening. She states, "I didn't mind his putting his name in the cast but I thought that if mine went in, too, people would think it was one of those vanity productions, which, of course, it isn't."

²²² Cryer and Ford, "Performance and Storytelling Session."

²²³ Kasha and Hirschhorn, "Gretchen Cryer," 77. Cryer proudly recounts his activism: "First he was a draft resister; then he joined the war resisters' league here in New York. He was one of the first people to go swimming out and lay his body across the bow of nuclear submarines. You know, direct action—direct passive resistance."

²²⁴ Sebesta, "Social Consciousness," 203.

²²⁵ Ford, scrapbook materials, Beatrice Berg, "From School Days to Sweet Days," *New York Times*, February 15, 1970. David Cryer was a replacement actor for two different roles.

²²⁶ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

Producers Haila Stoddard, Mark Wright, and Duane Wilder had immediately staked a claim in the show, and Ford recalls that she and Cryer never auditioned it for anyone else. After the producers held an audition for the show with NBC executives, Cryer and Ford received a call that afternoon from Stoddard saying that NBC would capitalize the entire show. Gretchen recalls, “The words she [Stoddard] used were: ‘They flipped!’ . . . So that experience was completely different from *Now Is the Time* where we did *so* many backers’ auditions and had investors coming in for \$200 and \$500—little amounts—to make up the \$40,000.”²²⁷

Ford remembers that the show opened to rave reviews from the New York critics, and she and Cryer sat in a state of shock in the press agent’s office the next morning: “We looked at each other and said, ‘We will never get reviews like this again in our entire lives.’” Cryer responds, “And we never did.”²²⁸

The musical combines two plays with music, *The Elevator* and *I Want to Walk to San Francisco*. Austin Pendleton played the character Isaac in both of the sections, and Fredericka Weber played Ingrid in the first play and Alice in the second. Cryer met Pendleton while performing at Yale University, and he became a significant figure in her and Ford’s career, as the star of *Isaac*, the director of *Shelter*, the director of Ford’s show, *Blue Roses*, and the director of *Alterations*, that featured Cryer as an actor.

Their next musical, *Shelter*, had an unsuccessful Broadway debut in 1973, and lasted a month. Cryer addressed the problem of making a living as a single parent in an article she wrote for the *New York Times* in May of 1973. Cryer opens with a humanistic

²²⁷ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

²²⁸ Cryer and Ford, “Performance and Storytelling Session.”

statement: “Clearly [making a living in] the theater these days is a struggle for both men and women.” She describes how playwrights must be “passionate maniacs” to stay with it, and her opening question is one she had asked as an advocate for female writers: “Why are there so few women playwrights in the struggle?” She answers from her personal experience as an “unmarried head of a household,” and describes the feelings of guilt prompted by her young daughter and an advice-giving neighbor, and the financial repercussions of *Shelter*’s demise. Cryer summarizes her problem and solution:

So how am I to justify this folly? By telling my children to stop crying, that I am having a terrific time and love expressing myself in this manner? Yep, that’s what I tell them, all the while figuring out other ways to make the bread so that I can keep doing this thing I love to do.²²⁹

Cryer ends her discussion by pondering how many female playwrights might be stifling their creativity due to feelings of guilt.

Austin Pendleton directed *Shelter*, and Thomas Pierson, a theatrical music director active on Broadway in the 1970s, orchestrated Ford’s music and provided electronic arrangements for parts of the score.²³⁰ The show had no out-of-town trial runs as many musicals do, and only three weeks of previews before its Broadway opening. In that short timeframe, Cryer worked ardently to adjust the book to better suit cast members.²³¹ *Shelter*’s short run and poor reception are in part due to the unwillingness of male reviewers and audience members to examine the psychological metaphor of a man

²²⁹ Gretchen Cryer, “Where Are the Women Playwrights?,” *New York Times*, May 20, 1973, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1973/05/20/90439794.html?pageNumber=129>. The article includes fascinating responses from Lillian Hellman, Jean Kerr, Clare Boothe Luce, and other female playwrights.

²³⁰ Accessed October 29, 2017, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/shelter-3171/#opennightcredit>.

²³¹ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

living in an artificially created environment, oblivious to his emotional responsibility for his wife and family.

Shelter's foray onto the Broadway stage was probably a misstep. Cryer admits, "I think it should have been off Broadway, because it was a small chamber musical, four characters and a computer."²³² She attributes the show's inability to manifest her initial intentions partly to the massive set and abundance of special effects. Such production details and a large Broadway stage could contradict the intimacy of a small cast and philosophical topic. Cryer concedes, "What I ended up seeing on the stage of the Golden Theatre bore no relationship whatsoever to what I thought I had written. . . . It's nobody's fault. It slipped out of shape."²³³

Cryer and Ford's cabaret music and their live performance experiences, discussed below, provided the impetus Cryer needed to set the story for their next musical, *I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road*. Cryer recalls the evening Craig Zadan decided to bring their idea to the attention of the Public Theater's producer, Joseph Papp. Zadan had produced Cryer and Ford's cabaret act at the Ballroom, and worked as Papp's assistant. After hearing them perform two songs that they announced were from a show they were writing, he told them that as soon as they finished the musical, they could show it to Papp.²³⁴ After their presentation to Papp, he agreed to back the show, providing Cryer would play the lead.²³⁵ Cryer recalls Papp telling her, "I think since it's

²³² Kasha and Hirschhorn, "Gretchen Cryer," 79.

²³³ Kasha and Hirschhorn, "Gretchen Cryer," 80.

²³⁴ Cryer, Oral History.

²³⁵ Turan and Papp, "I'm Getting My Act Together," 452.

somewhat autobiographical—I think it would be good for you to do it.”²³⁶ The fact that Papp understood the musical’s audience appeal to women, insisted Cryer play the lead, and continued to believe in it in spite of negative reviews are important factors in its success.

I’m Getting My Act Together became the natural vehicle for their most personal aesthetic as singer-songwriters. Cryer and Ford’s personal experiences of divorce, and the strains of balancing personal and professional duties, reveal themselves in *I’m Getting My Act Together*. The musical addresses the communication problems women and men faced during the era of second-wave feminism that related to Cryer’s inability to express herself fully in her relationship, and the inability of her marriage to survive under those circumstances. Her divorce motivated her to ask herself who she was without a husband, commenting, “that’s a whole reevaluation and a whole rediscovery. . . . That’s what *I’m Getting My Act Together* is about.”²³⁷ Ford acknowledges the issue women faced:

The idea of being a certain type of person that would be appealing to a man, and be the epitome of womanhood. . . . We also thought it was sad to see how it didn’t work out so often between men and women . . . [due to] expectations and people not being able to live up to the expectations either way.²³⁸

The commentary from Cryer and Ford reveals their personal connection to the musical’s themes of self-discovery and communication between the sexes.

Cryer’s story of the show’s genesis warrants a verbatim passage:

The main impetus for the show had to do with feeling so deeply the changes that I had personally gone through in my life. . . . I couldn’t find a

²³⁶ Cryer and Ford, interview by Winer.

²³⁷ Kasha and Hirschhorn, “Gretchen Cryer,” 83. She states, “The break-up wasn’t his fault. It was our lack of communication.”

²³⁸ Ford, Oral History.

theatrical metaphor for it. Then one night, while Nancy and I were performing, I just thought of that phrase—I'm getting my act together and taking it on the road—because she and I were always moving around and packing and unpacking our equipment. And suddenly, in a flash, an instant, I thought, "Ah, this show could be about a woman who's getting her act together, and her act has songs about her life in it, and she's decided to make her act about her life." She's having to say, "I have to define myself now. I can't be who I was to please everybody else." . . . And the minute I had that idea, it just seemed to write itself.²³⁹

From its debut through its extended run, *I'm Getting My Act Together* elicited strong responses from audience members, including a threat of violence directed at Cryer for her feminist material. Preview performances elicited an overwhelmingly positive response.²⁴⁰ Surprisingly, the opening night was, according to Cryer, "deadly," and the show might have soon faltered.²⁴¹ After Papp read an article in the *New York Times* stating that there were fifty thousand single women in the city, he realized that they were the show's audience. He decided to hold Wednesday night cast talkbacks, and the evening that had seen the smallest audiences began to sell out. Cryer recalls, "Audience members would confront other audience members. Verbal battles would break out. Husbands walked out on wives, wives walked out on husbands, and one man said it was a good thing he didn't have a gun or he would have shot me if he had. Those Wednesday night conflagrations went on for the whole three-year run."²⁴² Papp's decision to hold the

²³⁹ Turan and Papp, "I'm Getting My Act Together," 450-51.

²⁴⁰ Turan and Papp, "I'm Getting My Act Together," 454. Zadan recalls, "I had never seen an audience react the way they reacted to this show. They were screaming and applauding during the show, yelling things out. . . . The show did touch a nerve, and word got out about it very quickly. The house was packed with women, and it was their show. . . . It didn't feel like a play, it felt like an event."

²⁴¹ Turan and Papp, "I'm Getting My Act Together," 454. Cryer describes how one-third to a half of the audience were theater students who were taking notes. The rest were critics, also taking notes. Zadan recalls opening-night production jitters and the emotionally detached, note-taking audience, saying, "That one night was death."

²⁴² Cryer and Ford, "Song Is You!"

talk sessions is characteristic of his promotional savvy, and also his humanistic bent. Providing an opportunity for the audience to talk with Cryer and other cast members, and air their own emotions about their personal relationships, enhanced the show's popular appeal.

Cryer relished appearing in the leading role of Heather, recalling, "I had the remarkable experience of being able, night after night, to feel the responses, get the feedback. In writing the thing, I felt I had put out something of myself, and I had the marvelous exhilaration of getting back, of having the circle completed night after night."²⁴³ Cryer's understudy, Betty Aberlin, was her first replacement in the role, and notable performers Betty Buckley, Carol Hall, Anne Kaye, Phyllis Newman, and Virginia Vestoff performed the role.

Ford played the character toward the end of the three-year run.²⁴⁴ She told Carol Lawson of the *New York Times* that she was having a wonderful time performing a part where she had every other line, and ten out of twelve songs. She shared with Lawson, "This is a very exciting time for us, but I'm not really surprised by the success of the show. I always thought something that Gretchen and I wrote would take off. You have to believe that, or you can't continue in this business."²⁴⁵

In the early eighties, *I'm Getting My Act Together* brought Cryer and Ford solid financial returns and international acclaim.²⁴⁶ *I'm Getting My Act Together* did, in a

²⁴³ Kasha and Hirschhorn, "Gretchen Cryer," 80.

²⁴⁴ Cryer and Ford, interview by author. Ford also understudied and occasionally appeared in the roles of the teachers in *Now Is the Time*, and *The Zeitgeist* in *Isaac*.

²⁴⁵ Ford, scrapbook materials, Carol Lawson, "Broadway," *New York Times*, December 12, 1980.

²⁴⁶ Cryer and Ford, interview by Stitt. Cryer recalls that the three years in New York, and a year each in Chicago and Los Angeles provided consistent royalty income.

sense, hit the road, with productions in Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston, Washington D.C., and eventually dozens of international cities.²⁴⁷ An article in *Variety* about the German productions noted that the American musical “ranked as the most-performed work in West German music theatres last season, with 323 performances, in eleven productions . . . [and] shoved Mozart’s ‘Magic Flute’ into second place, with 228 performances.”²⁴⁸

Other Productions

Cryer and Ford collaborated on other projects in the 1980s and 1990s that coincided with and followed the successful years of *I’m Getting My Act Together*. The musicals discussed below demonstrate Cryer and Ford’s adaptable process of using their pre-written materials to create new works. In the summer of 1980, the State University of New York (SUNY) at Purchase, with financial backing from Pepsico, produced the first Summerfare program that ran from July 11 through August 10. Cryer and Ford devised an unusual form for their festival offering, initiating a practice of revision and reuse that would serve them in future productions. Their musical, *Isaac & Ingrid & Michael*, adapted two earlier works into a hybrid form, which was an anomaly for the time. *Isaac*’s first play, *The Elevator*, combined with *Shelter* after Cryer and Ford realized the similarity between the characters of Isaac and Michael. Ford explains that the merger required character changes, and necessitated the omission of *Isaac*’s second play, *I Want*

²⁴⁷ Cryer and Ford, interview by author. Cryer also played Heather in productions in Chicago, Los Angeles, and at the Fringe in Edinburgh.

²⁴⁸ Ford, scrapbook materials, *Variety*, January 5, 1981. The German title for *I’m Getting My Act Together* is *Ich steig aus und mach ne eigene Show*.

to *Walk to San Francisco*.²⁴⁹ Still, it was an innovative way to revive their failed Broadway musical, *Shelter*, and its talking and singing computer, Arthur.

In 1985, Cryer and Ford assembled a collection of their songs for a revue, *Hang On to the Good Times*, produced by off Broadway's Manhattan Theater Club, and directed by Richard Maltby, Jr. The revue drew from *I'm Getting My Act Together*, *Shelter*, and other Cryer and Ford songs.²⁵⁰ Two prominent *New York Times* critics had markedly different responses. Frank Rich considered Cryer and Ford's body of music too modest to even warrant a show, stating, "One leaves the theater thinking less of the team's songs than one did upon arrival." Although Rich understood the performance's overriding theme—"the sexual revolution: Liberated women and would-be liberated men are all searching for self-fulfillment, freedom and love in a new, confusing order"—he determined that the songs as a whole lacked "an edge," and that the characters were "well-meaning and sensitive to a fault."²⁵¹ In contrast, Mel Gussow praised the work, and described the "activist womanly sensibility and thematic content" of the songs. He declared director Maltby a master of the song anthology form, and praised the four actors for their performances in the "affectionate salute to the versatile songwriting team."

²⁴⁹ Cryer and Ford, interview by author. The male character announces that he used to be Isaac and now calls himself Michael. The character of Ingrid is the former character of Maud from *Shelter*, the character of Gloria from *Shelter* is omitted, and the characters of Wednesday and the talking computer, Arthur, remain the same.

²⁵⁰ Accessed November 6, 2017, <http://www.lortel.org/Archives/Production/1904>.

²⁵¹ Frank Rich, "The Stage: 'Hang On,' A Cryer-Ford Revue," *New York Times*, February 19, 1985, <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/02/19/theater/the-stage-hang-on-a-cryer-ford-revue.html>.

Gussow deemed off Broadway to be “demonstrating small but salutary signs of vitality,” and held that Cryer and Ford’s show was “consistently entertaining in its own right.”²⁵²

In 1997, Cryer and Ford resurrected *Isaac & Ingrid & Michael*, and renamed it *The Last Sweet Days*. The version lasted for fifteen performances, April 6 through April 20, at off Broadway’s York Theatre at St. Peter’s Church, and although it closed two weeks earlier than planned, a cast recording was made. Cryer admits that *Isaac*’s second act had been less developed than the first, and that *Shelter* was never fully realized, calling it “a chamber musical we inflated to a Broadway production.” Cryer believed that, twenty-seven years after the original production of *Isaac* in 1970, the use of computers in daily life had caught up with the musical, noting: “It’s about a guy who decides to create his own reality and live in it—much in the way people are doing now with computer relationships and virtual reality.”²⁵³

During the decade, Cryer turned to music composition, writing industrial musicals as “a way to make money in the 1990s.”²⁵⁴ The shows were Broadway-sized book musicals, and Cryer recollects writing at least five productions to be performed for the sales forces of health companies when they launched a new drug.²⁵⁵ Her experience

²⁵² Mel Gussow, “Stage View: Off Broadway Is Carrying The Tune,” *New York Times*, February 24, 1985, <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/02/24/theater/stage-view-off-broadway-is-carrying-the-tune.html>.

²⁵³ David Lefkowitz, “Last Few Days of York’s *Last Sweet Days*—But Recording Coming,” April 6, 1997, accessed November 15, 2017, <http://www.playbill.com/article/last-few-days-of-yorks-last-sweet-days-but-recording-coming-com-69967>.

²⁵⁴ Accessed October 21, 2018, <https://www.industrialmusicals.com>. Steve Young and Sport Murphy, *Everything’s Coming Up Profits: The Golden Age of Industrial Musical* (New York: Blast Books, Inc. 2013) provides a 251-page account of the productions and their history. American corporations commissioned industrials from the 1950s to the 1980s to educate and motivate their sales forces.

²⁵⁵ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

writing musicals for businesses comfortably segued into another lucrative venture she shared with Ford, writing for the American Girl company.

A Young Female Market

In 1998, Cryer and Ford entered into a ten-year business relationship that brought their music to a new audience—young girls. Their new employer was the retail company, American Girl, and over the next three years they immersed themselves in the creation of two musical revues for the company's stores' theaters. American Girl, from its inception as a catalogue company in 1986 through its development that brought extravagant retail stores called American Girl Place to Chicago (1998), New York City (2003), and Los Angeles (2006), maintains a mission to empower girls from an early age. Cryer discovered the American Girl books while looking for a present for her granddaughter, and "immediately thought these stories about courageous young heroines would make a great musical." Pleasant Rowland, the founder of American Girl, and a fan of Cryer and Ford, commissioned them to write the revues.²⁵⁶

Cryer and Ford wrote songs to reflect the diverse range of personalities, backgrounds, and ethnicities of the dolls, and uphold the company's ideal of tenacious young females who achieve their goals and celebrate their triumphs over society's limitations. Their books and music for *The American Girls Revue* (1998) and *Circle of Friends* (2001) showcase girls from past and present American life. Lisa Gordon, a history professor at New York University, said of *The American Girls Revue*, "It's very well researched. They try to present a diverse picture of what it was like for American

²⁵⁶ Cryer and Ford, "Song Is You!"

girls. And I know that for many girls, it has rekindled their interest in women's history."²⁵⁷ Ford relished the chance to write music to reflect different historical periods, filtered through contemporary sensibilities. The process even resulted in a reversal of the team's typical approach to songwriting. Ford says, "In order to prove to myself that I could, I started experimenting with writing some themes without words to begin with, the first one being for Felicity, a girl who was 10 in 1774, and then Gretchen added the lyrics."²⁵⁸

The show's characters and themes captured the attention of the young audiences, and Cryer noted that the girls who attended the performances had an opportunity to see others like themselves on stage overcome their challenges, and reasons, "I definitely think that it's a great message for little girls right now because it empowers them and lets them feel that they can . . . make a contribution."²⁵⁹ According to writer Lynne Heffley, Cryer felt that "writing about pre-adolescent girls as smart, strong and compassionate" was a satisfying arc that connected to her previous works about women finding their voices. Cryer concludes the article stating a hope that, in spite of the musical appearing in a highly commercial establishment, people who came to buy would attend the show and be affected by it.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ Stephen Kinzer, "Dolls as Role Models, Neither Barbie nor Britney," *New York Times*, November 6, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/06/arts/dolls-as-role-models-neither-barbie-nor-britney.html>.

²⁵⁸ Cryer and Ford, "Song Is You!"

²⁵⁹ Cryer and Ford, interview by Winer. Cryer comments that there were fifty-five girls performing in the show because of the necessity for different casts due to the rotation of many shows each week.

²⁶⁰ Lynne Heffley, "In the Guise of Dolls, the Past Unfolds," *Los Angeles Times*, June 18, 2006, <http://articles.latimes.com/2006/jun/18/entertainment/ca-american-girl18>.

A second show, *Circle of Friends*, followed, which writer Chris Jones called, “a top-quality theatrical production with a message not of consumerism . . . but of empowerment and community responsibility.”²⁶¹ Cryer and Ford were making great strides reaching the female “tween” and younger market, and an American Girl Place opened on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan in 2003. The live entertainment ended at all three stores in 2008, and American Girl spokesperson Julie Parks relayed that interactive “experiential retail offerings” would replace the live shows.²⁶²

Before the American Girl revues closed, Cryer and Ford were busy working on another contribution to the children’s theater market. Their musical, *Anne of Green Gables*, adapts the story of Lucy Maud Montgomery’s 1908 classic novel, and ran for a five-week engagement in 2007 (see Conclusion).

The Elusive “Eleanor” Musical

One of Cryer and Ford’s works, which has had a long gestational history but no professional productions, is a musical called *Eleanor*. Cryer and Ford’s advocacy of the powerful female voice manifests again in their musical portrayal of Eleanor Roosevelt. In October of 2008, the musical, then called *Einstein and the Roosevelts*, premiered at their alma mater, DePauw University, where they had graduated over fifty years earlier. In 2011, Denison University produced *Einstein and the Roosevelts* when Cryer served as the Jonathan R. Reynolds Playwright-in-Residence.²⁶³ The musical about Eleanor, however,

²⁶¹ Chris Jones, “American Girl Place’s ‘Circle’ chop off the Broadway Block,” October 3, 2001, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2001-10-03-0110030166-story.html>.

²⁶² Lynne Heffley, “American Girl Shows Sing Adieu,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 2008, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/feb/26/entertainment/et-quick26.S1>.

²⁶³ Accessed November 29, 2017, <https://denison.edu/academics/theatre/wh/22239>.

has a decades-old history that includes the performance of some of its songs in various cabaret performances, a production in 1986, and many different titles and lost opportunities.

Betsko and Koenig uncovered part of the musical's history in an interview with Cryer. After Cryer and Ford wrote the songs for the original book, they decided the approach was too conventional and linear, and that the story focused too much on historical facts and not enough on Eleanor Roosevelt's personal life. They broke off their relationship with the bookwriter, and Cryer decided to create the story herself.²⁶⁴

Cryer describes Eleanor as a passionate woman who was affectionate with her close friends.²⁶⁵ The story unfolds at her hundredth birthday party, thrown by her cousin Alice Roosevelt Longworth, and attended by the significant people in Eleanor's life. In *Eleanor*, Cryer includes the spirit of Albert Einstein, who has discovered how to juxtapose moments between the past and present, and she uses the idea humorously since he is not always in control of his technique. She explains that the whole story unfolds through this device, and adds, "It's almost cinematic."²⁶⁶ The premise bears a resemblance to two operas. Philip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach*, which premiered at the Metropolitan Opera in 1976, featured a violinist who appears on stage as the scientist. The pretext for *Eleanor*'s plot precedes a similar idea in John Corigliano's 1991 opera,

²⁶⁴ Cryer, interview by Betsko and Koenig, 105.

²⁶⁵ Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford, "Eleanor," unpublished manuscript, June 2018, PDF file. *Eleanor* includes dialogue and numbers that emphasize the support that Associated Press journalist, Lorena (Hick) Hickock, provided Eleanor, and the friendship between them. At the show's conclusion, Hick, a lesbian, accuses Eleanor of ruining her life, and Eleanor responds: "I'm not the one who can give you what you need. I never was. I'm sorry." Some historians infer a lesbian relationship between the two based on their personal correspondence. See Rodger Streitmatter, *Empty Without You: The Intimate Letters of Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok* (New York: Free Press, 1998).

²⁶⁶ Cryer, interview by Betsko and Koenig, 106.

The Ghosts of Versailles, which includes a gathering of spirits and a settling of scores among the characters.

Cryer expresses her stance on feminism, which appears to have emerged more strongly through her study and interpretation of Eleanor's persona and her message.

Cryer contends:

The values we've absorbed are male-dominated values which are considered THE universal values. If a woman is writing from her own point of view . . . she is counterculture, a revolutionary, by definition; her point of view is from outside the system—unless she has absorbed a male sensibility.²⁶⁷

After researching the era of the Depression and World War II, she complained, "It's all about *men* and their doings." Franklin D. Roosevelt's first inaugural speech suggested Americans wanted "work, with all the moral and spiritual values that go with it; and, with that work, a reasonable measure of security for themselves and for their wives and children." Cryer declares, "Okay, what have we got there? That the American *people* were *men*. . . . What do the MEN want?"²⁶⁸

The first mention of the musical, then called *Nell*, appears in the *Kalamazoo Gazette* in 1978.²⁶⁹ The first evidence of the score is in 1981, when Cryer and Ford appeared in the 92nd Street Y's "Lyrics and Lyricists" series and included songs from *Eleanor*, which they described as a future musical.²⁷⁰ In 1984, the New York Society for Ethical Culture held a centennial celebration for Eleanor Roosevelt, and Cryer and Ford

²⁶⁷ Cryer, interview by Betsko and Koenig, 96.

²⁶⁸ Cryer, interview by Betsko and Koenig, 95-96.

²⁶⁹ Ford, scrapbook materials, "Nancy's New Musical," *Kalamazoo Gazette*, December 3, 1978.

²⁷⁰ John S. Wilson, "Y Series Offers Newer Lyricists," *New York Times*, January 9, 1981, <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/01/09/arts/y-series-offers-newer-lyricists.html>.

provided readings from *Eleanor*, a “Broadway-bound musical.”²⁷¹ In 1986, *Eleanor* debuted at the Williamstown Theatre Festival for a short run from August 13 through 24. The production was also Cryer’s professional directorial debut. Meant to be a work in progress, a critic from *Variety* wrote a negative review that Cryer believes cast a shadow on the work at the time.²⁷² Stephen Holden mentions a completed musical about Eleanor Roosevelt, *Eleanor and Alice Play the Palace*, in his review of Cryer’s solo cabaret act, “Back in My Life,” in April of 1989. Quoted in his article, Cryer again speaks of Eleanor: “One of the things we suggest is that she might not have accomplished so much had she had a simple happy marriage. It took the trauma of having her personal life fall apart to force her to pull herself together and go out and live her life in the world.”²⁷³ Perhaps Cryer’s own marital challenges gave rise to a more empathetic connection with Eleanor.

In an interview with Wollman, Cryer discusses an issue that surfaced during her and Ford’s career in the 1970s and 1980s when men dominated the theater industry. She recalls one agent, whose name she forgets, who referred to her and Ford as “those dykes.”

Personal communication from Cryer to Wollman elaborates on the situation:

And of course, you know, “the feminists are writing about another woman, another lesbian.” . . . To the extent that people saw feminists as dour, serious, ball-busting people, that worked against us. . . . And then, in the mid- to late-80s . . . the word “feminist” had a [more] negative connotation . . . feminists were not seen as fun-loving . . . they would think, “oh, another piece written by feminists, yeah, that’ll be about as much fun as going to the dentist.” . . . It wasn’t anybody saying we don’t want to

²⁷¹ Ford, scrapbook materials, Advertisement, New York Society for Ethical Culture, “Eleanor Roosevelt 100.”

²⁷² Cryer, Oral History.

²⁷³ Stephen Holden, “Pop/Jazz: 3 Performers Who Thrive in Cabaret or on Stage,” *New York Times*, April 14, 1989, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/04/14/arts/pop-jazz-3-performers-who-thrive-in-cabaret-or-on-stage.html>.

produce your show, we don't want to work with you because you're women. We never had that. But there was just a subtle shadow.²⁷⁴

Cryer and Ford hoped for a Broadway run, but a story that featured a proto-feminist like Eleanor Roosevelt may have been defeated by a backlash against feminism, and a lack of support from male producers.

Eleanor has not seen a professional production, but Cryer and Ford maintain hope for the musical. The two university productions suggest that liberal-leaning student audiences could provide a market for the show.

Cabaret Performance

From the early 1970s onward, Cryer and Ford presented cabaret performances that featured original songs and reflected their individual journeys. Their music for this venue is a neglected, although important, component of their output, and has coexisted with their theatrical stage works throughout the decades. Their cabaret style reflects the most specific case of writing what they understood from their own experiences, and led to their most reactive and personal staged musical, *I'm Getting My Act Together*, in 1978. The show drew directly from the intimate performance style of cabaret, borrowed one number, "Natural High," for its score, and cemented their recognition in the theater industry.

Their Broadway attempt, *Shelter*, had closed in March of 1973. Cryer recalls that she and Ford shared a mild feeling of disillusionment about writing for commercial theater at the time.

²⁷⁴ Wollman, "Not-So-Angry Feminist Musicals," 128.

We decided that the theater was just so unpredictable an enterprise that we had better figure out some line of work that had more stability. We thought “We’ll take our lives into our own hands—write our own songs and sing them and record them and get a band together and travel around and promote our records.”²⁷⁵

August of 1973 is one of the first evidenced dates for an appearance by Cryer and Ford as singer-songwriters, and Ford concurs, stating: “I believe that was the first time that we performed like we eventually did.” They joined other female songwriters and singers onstage at the Manhattan Theater Club for a program called *SONGFEST Women*.²⁷⁶ This particular performance event, “Circle of Sound,” had no predominant theme or style, and the entertainment guide in the *New York Times* describes a “tossed salad of songs,” typical of cabaret shows, that included Broadway show tunes, ballads, and contemporary numbers accompanied by piano and/or guitar.²⁷⁷

The singer-songwriter genre Cryer and Ford adopted differed from the performance style usually found in musical theater. A song written in a singer-songwriter style focuses on the voice, and features either a solo artist or a small group of performers. Singers perform with mastery on acoustic instruments, particularly a guitar or piano, and because the music is lyric-driven, the accompaniment is often sparse to emphasize the text. The adult-contemporary genre draws from various styles such as folk, country, pop, rock, and Tin Pan Alley and its traditional, simple forms such as AABA. Musicologist Wilfred Mellers notes how music styles change to reflect the subject matter; for example, Joni Mitchell’s early songs evoke her small-town roots, and Dory Previn’s music projects

²⁷⁵ Cryer and Ford, “Performance and Storytelling Session.”

²⁷⁶ Cryer and Ford, interview by author. Cryer recalls that Mary Rodgers was in the audience, and Betty Buckley impressively cried “on a dime” during her number.

²⁷⁷ “Going Out Guide,” *New York Times*, August 13, 1973, <http://www.nytimes.com/1973/08/13/archives/going-out-guide.html>.

an urban intelligence and wit. Mellers finds a middle ground in Carole King's music, which he calls "relatively placeless," and notes that her songs often blend rural-sounding modal melodies with a harmony that contains folk and blues sounds.²⁷⁸

Cryer and Ford's self-composed and intimate cabaret songs led to the production of two vinyl albums in the mid-1970s. *Cryer & Ford* (1975), and *Cryer and Ford: You Know My Music* (1977) preserve the time they spent as a contemporary singer-songwriter duo, with Cryer singing lead vocals, and Ford on the piano and providing harmonies.²⁷⁹ Cryer and Ford called the songs, about their own or their friends' experiences, "a scrapbook of our lives."²⁸⁰ Ford recalls that after writing the songs, their publisher felt they should not only make the albums, but go out on the road and perform them in cabarets. She found many of the experiences unsatisfying, and recalls, "We often felt as though we were put in a package and sold, and that cabaret and performing experience went into *Getting My Act Together*."²⁸¹

Sid Bernstein, the man who brought the Beatles to America, managed the duo, and sent them out on the road. Ford recalls that one of their first gigs was in Woodstock, New York, where a raucous crowd playing pinball machines drowned them out. A seedy motel room housed Ford, Gretchen, their four-man band, a roadie and his girlfriend in two rooms—one with no heat and another with no working toilet. After a few other difficult experiences, Ford recalls: "I finally told Gretchen that I really wanted to write

²⁷⁸ Mellers, *Angels of the Night*, 187-88.

²⁷⁹ Cryer and Ford, interview by author. The first album sold around 20,000 copies, and "Changing" became a hit song. Their recordings and performances led to guest appearances on talk shows hosted by Dick Cavett, Phil Donahue, Merv Griffin, Dinah Shore, and others.

²⁸⁰ Cryer and Ford, interview by Stitt.

²⁸¹ Turan and Papp, "I'm Getting My Act Together," 450.

another show with her, but I did not want to go out on the road any more and I thought she could go solo. I knew she loved performing and she was good at it.” Cryer concurred; she was ready for a new show as well.²⁸² The result was *I’m Getting My Act Together*.

Cryer and Ford’s appearance in the 92nd Street Y’s “Lyrics and Lyricists” series on March 1, 1981 suggests that they had accomplished enough to merit an early career retrospective, and they reminisced about their college days, four musicals, two record albums, and cabaret act. Due to the success of *I’m Getting My Act Together*, which was closing on March 15 but playing internationally, the industry now recognized the duo as a solid collaborative team.²⁸³ Cryer and Ford continue to make onstage music together as of this writing (see Conclusion).

Cryer and Ford’s cabaret performances reveal their penchant for writing about women, self-discovery, and self-expression. *New York Times* critic, John S. Wilson, followed their early cabaret career in his reviews, and typically picked up on their messages. As early as 1973, and in spite of the event being their first outing, Wilson’s review singled them out, acknowledging their musical theater contributions, and their ability to break out of the theatrical convention of a character-performed song to perform in the direct and personal singer-songwriter style.²⁸⁴

In a 1975 review, “The Misses Cryer and Ford Sing as Well as Write,” Wilson perceptively tuned into the vitality of the songs, noting, “they are, essentially, about being

²⁸² Cryer and Ford, “Performance and Storytelling Session.”

²⁸³ Stephen Holden, “Cryer-Ford Lyricists Get The Act Together Again,” March 4, 1981, <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/03/04/theater/cryer-ford-lyricists-get-the-act-together-again.html>.

²⁸⁴ John S. Wilson, “Songs By Women At Theater Club,” *New York Times*, October 25, 1973, <http://www.nytimes.com/1973/10/25/archives/songs-by-women-at-theater-club-cryer-ford-performance-is.html>.

alive.²⁸⁵ Many of them deal with people who are discovering themselves, becoming aware of their own potential.” Still, Wilson succumbed to a visual description of Cryer, and somewhat ambiguous appraisal of their style:

With Miss Ford at the piano and Miss Cryer standing beside it, her strong, gloriously pixie face simultaneously warm and forceful, they sing tightly coordinated duets that have an unusual mixture of unity and variety. Their singing is polished and precise, but with an easy projection that allows the emphasis to fall where it belongs—on what the song is saying.²⁸⁶

In December of 1976, Wilson praised Cryer and Ford’s music and performance artistry. Famed lyricist and librettist Alan Jay Lerner had postponed an appearance at the “Broadway at the Ballroom” series, and Wilson acknowledged that Cryer and Ford’s willingness to fill in on short notice kept the series going and “brought a fresh point of view to it.” He claimed they provided the Ballroom with “a mixture of performing professionalism and composing professionalism that has previously been missing.” But perhaps the most telling comment in the review is Cryer’s own; that the music revealed “women who are searching for themselves—songs reflecting us.”²⁸⁷

²⁸⁵ Ben Zimmer, “Ms.,” *New York Times*, October 23, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/25/magazine/25FOB-onlanguage-t.html>. Zimmer writes: “The *New York Times* waited until 1986 to announce that it would embrace the use of *Ms.* as an honorific alongside *Miss* and *Mrs.* Eighty-five years after *The Sunday Republican*’s unassuming contribution to our modern lexicon, *The Times* admitted that the ‘void in the English language’ had been filled.” A November 10, 1901 article in *The Sunday Republican* had once suggested that the title *Ms.* would be “a tactfully ambiguous compromise between *Miss* and *Mrs.*”

²⁸⁶ John S. Wilson, “The Misses Cryer and Ford Sing as Well as Write,” *New York Times*, July 17, 1975, http://www.nytimes.com/1975/07/17/archives/the-misses-cryer-and-ford-sing-as-well-as-write.html?_r=0. Wilson cited particular song titles: “This theme of personal, individual freedom is expressed in ‘You Can Never Know My Mind,’ in ‘I’m a Free Woman’ and in the self-discovery of ‘Changes.’” The last song was likely “Changing,” included on their album, *Cryer & Ford*.

²⁸⁷ John S. Wilson, “Pop Music: Cryer and Ford,” *New York Times*, December 3, 1976, <http://www.nytimes.com/1976/12/03/archives/pop-music-cryer-and-ford.html>. Wilson adds both a physical and personal description: “The two women form a well-balanced team—Miss Cryer’s ebullience set against Miss Ford’s more subdued attitude, Miss Cryer standing and moving around, Miss Ford seated at the piano, Miss Cryer bringing both her mother and her father as well as herself into her songs while Miss Ford’s only personal exposure is a song she wrote for her husband, ‘I Don’t Want to Be Free of You.’ Each establishes a definite personality, but they both reach their listeners with equal success.”

In August of 1977, Wilson reiterated his admiration for Cryer and Ford, and commented on the “great success” of their recent focus on songs about women. Announcing the formulation of their new show, *I’m Getting My Act Together*, he described songs performed from the score that contained “nuances of shading.” He also focused on their performance talents, describing “Miss Ford’s soft, intimate voice, Miss Cryer’s warmth and openness” and the “feathery blending of both voices in their duets.”²⁸⁸ The authenticity of the performance style differed from the more presentational character-driven songs of traditional musical theater. *I’m Getting My Act Together*, which grew out of their cabaret act, would prove to be a successful theatrical manifestation of their work together as cabaret performers.

Independent Works

Along with a steady record of collaboration over six decades, Cryer and Ford have pursued independent projects since the 1960s. A detailed discussion of their separate activities is beyond the scope of this thesis; however, Cryer has written and composed, acted in, and directed various musicals and plays, Ford has composed other musical projects, and worked as a scriptwriter for daytime dramas, and both have performed their own cabaret acts (see Appendix 4).

The personal and professional biographies of Cryer and Ford illustrate how women managed to develop important theatrical careers against the odds. As children and college students, they inadvertently laid the foundation for their futures. Their marriages in some ways provided the impetus and support for their musicals. Once divorced, they

²⁸⁸ John S. Wilson, “Cryer-Ford Team Sings At Cookery,” *New York Times*, August 20, 1977, <http://www.nytimes.com/1977/08/20/archives/cryerford-team-sings-at-cookery.html>.

broke from theatrical convention, and continued their collaborative process based on mutual support and respect. Their characteristic mix of tenacity and flexibility created a shared career that began with their first musical theater collaboration in 1955—a career that now spans sixty-four years. In the twenty-first century, they have continued to take on work projects that appeal to them (see Conclusion).

CHAPTER THREE: “YOU KNOW MY MUSIC”

THE SHOWS IN THEIR TIME

This purpose of this chapter is to illuminate a wider range of topics than thus far acknowledged in Cryer and Ford’s first four professional musicals. While some of the literature on Cryer and Ford has touched on the social issues they tackle in their shows, this chapter furthers the discussion with a deeper look at the ways Cryer and Ford focused on contemporary concerns. I examine the thematic material and characters in the books to consider the political and social messages, and describe ways their works have been misunderstood. The stories project Cryer and Ford’s social consciousness, and they advocate for the right to communicate one’s truth and/or a particular moral choice (*Now Is the Time for All Good Men*), the importance of personal contact and communication (*The Last Sweet Days of Isaac* and *Shelter*), and the need for self-discovery and self-expression (*I’m Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road*). The predominant themes shared by the four New York musicals are honest personal expression and communication with others. I offer a close study of the books and musical numbers to reveal the changes they made in the thematic material and composition as they moved from show to show. I provide summaries of production details and critical reception to illustrate their professional advances in the industry.

Cryer broadcasts her strong voice through her characters, and she acknowledges, “I tend to write people who philosophize loudly.”²⁸⁹ Cryer conjured up innovative storylines and characters, and conceptualized new ways to stage them. Ford added

²⁸⁹ Ford, scrapbook materials, Allan Wallach, “Theater/II The audience shapes her act,” *Newsday*, October 1, 1978.

unusual dimensions of sound through the use of contemporary instruments such as the synthesizer and Rock-si-chord, and drew from both period and contemporary popular styles, and at times included classical elements, to musicalize the dialogue and lyrics.

While both female and male characters demonstrate resolute personalities, the women typically show signs of growth and change, and the men often fail to “get the message.” Cryer intersperses humor in the dialogue, which has the effect of keeping the plots entertaining, even when dealing with serious topics. She explains, however, that she does not intend to write “funny lines.” She calls the humor “character comedy . . . it just comes out of the characters and the situations. I wouldn’t be good at writing ‘jokey’ things. I probably wouldn’t be good at writing standup.”²⁹⁰

While Cryer and Ford are typically viewed as the first feminist musical theater composers, Cryer emphasizes that their first two musicals were not meant to be part of the second-wave feminist movement. In an interview with theater critic Linda Winer, Cryer states, “our first two shows were actually anti-war shows.” She acknowledges that *Now Is the Time* was based on her pacifist brother, and that *Isaac* featured an anti-war-themed second act. Even though both shows addressed war issues, they are barely mentioned in Cryer and Ford literature, and Cryer remarks with chagrin, “we never got labeled as pacifists or anti-war people.”²⁹¹ Her comment raises the question of why anti-war sentiments would not be perceived as personally important to the concerns of female authors, or why being a feminist would preclude someone from having additional interests or concerns.

²⁹⁰ Cryer and Ford, interview by author. The musicals, however, tackle serious concerns and, at times, anger and frustration are motivating forces.

²⁹¹ Cryer and Ford, interview by Winer.

In the first two musicals, mortality is a potential consequence of failed communication. In *Now Is the Time*, the protagonist, Mike Butler, is a conscientious objector who is morally opposed to killing another human being, and is judged (and in the original version, killed) for his beliefs.²⁹² In the first half of *Isaac*, the title character is convinced that he is in his final year of life, and in the second half, he witnesses his own death as a protestor on a television screen in his jail cell. The second Isaac is younger than the first, so one can deduce that he is not going to die, but is in a downward slide because of his inability to detach from his media extensions and connect with another person or even himself.

Shelter tackles the possibility of desensitization, delusion, and isolation due to advances of technology, and offers a prescient story on the dangers of artificial intelligence. Cryer and Ford's exploration of popular songwriting and performance through cabaret performance led Cryer to a realization of how she might use that experience as a metaphor to write *I'm Getting My Act Together*. A cabaret singer rehearsing her act included songs that expressed the feelings and experiences that she, Ford, and many of their friends were dealing with in the era of second-wave feminism, including challenges with self-expression and male/female communication. The result was their most personal, and feminist, musical. The chapter concludes with an examination of Cryer and Ford's cabaret standard, "Old Friend." The ballad's context within the show and adoption by other artists show how a relatable song can be effective in different performance settings. An analysis of the lyrics reveals the intimate and authentic nature that characterizes a singer-songwriter number, and a comparison of

²⁹² In addition to political activism, morally defined views on war during America's involvement in Vietnam were part of the 1960s political Zeitgeist.

Ford's two musical settings offers insight into how variations can lend to the longevity of a song and make it into a standard.

Now Is the Time for All Good Men

Staging Pacifism in the 1960s

Cryer applied the principle of “writing what you know” in her first professional offering, *Now Is the Time*. She drew from her personal life to create both the male protagonist and the setting. Her brother inspired the role of the Vietnam War conscientious objector, and the plot unfolds in her home state of Indiana. Like Cryer's brother, the character in the musical expressed the viewpoint of the marginalized activist, and suffered similar consequences.²⁹³

Cryer and Ford's choice to create a musical based on Cryer's brother's experiences reveals their interest in political issues. Both *Now Is the Time* and *Hair*, among the first off-Broadway musicals to address the Vietnam conflict, feature male protagonists who resist the Vietnam War. Although Vietnam is never named in *Now Is the Time*, Cryer states that critics and audience members would have understood the context of the Vietnam War.²⁹⁴

²⁹³ Equity Library Theatre's production of *Now Is the Time for All Good Men* was filmed on May 14, 1971, and is available at Lincoln Center Library of the Performing Arts, Theatre on Film and Tape Archive. The opportunity to view the film on June 12, 2018 greatly aided my discussion.

²⁹⁴ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

Production Summary and Critical Reception of *Now Is the Time*

Now Is the Time (September 26-December 31, 1967) opened off Broadway less than a month before *Hair* (October 17). In 1966, David Cryer and Albert Poland co-produced a touring production of *The Fantasticks* to finance *Now Is the Time*, then referred to by its first title, *What's In The Wind?*²⁹⁵ Cryer and Poland then co-produced the New York show, which ran for 111 performances, from September 26 through December 31, at the Theatre de Lys in the West Village.²⁹⁶ *Now Is the Time* consisted of a cast of twelve actors and a band of three musicians, and production costs were around \$40,000, which Ford believes would cost one to one-and-a-half million now.²⁹⁷ Re-titled *Grass Roots*, a London production at the Leatherhead Theatre Club opened on October 15, 1968 and closed less than three weeks later.²⁹⁸ A revised production of *Now Is the Time* held a fourteen-performance run at the Equity Library Theatre beginning April 29, 1971.²⁹⁹

Cryer and Ford's reputation as significant musical writers relied on both critical and audience response. Reviews were mixed, although many critics acknowledged the music favorably, describing the songs as "bright," "fresh," and "lovely," and the score as "appealing," "laudable," and "charming." Commentary on Cryer's book either praised its message about individuality, personal integrity and tolerance, or complained about its

²⁹⁵ Ford, scrapbook materials, Untitled, *Indianapolis Star*, November 1966.

²⁹⁶ Accessed October 28, 2017, <http://www.lortel.org/Archives/Production/565>.

²⁹⁷ Cryer and Ford, "Song Is You!"

²⁹⁸ Cryer and Ford, interview by author. The production closed abruptly when a recently-fired junior bar man murdered the bar manager at the Leatherhead and shut the theater down.

²⁹⁹ Dietz, *Off Broadway Musicals*, 323. Dietz notes the addition of "What's in the Air?," "Katydid," and "Down Through History."

liberal clichés and melodramatic ending. More than one critic noted that the music and the story did not mix well together.³⁰⁰

Cryer and Ford reacted definitively to *New York Times* theater critic, Clive Barnes, who initially gave the show a negative review, complaining about the “melodramatic killing of the hero at the end.”³⁰¹ In the musical’s early performances, Mike was killed at the show’s conclusion after being ostracized for his beliefs. Cryer and Ford heeded Barnes’s opinion, and revised the ending to have Mike run out of town. The fans appreciative of Cryer and Ford’s pacifist message responded to Barnes’s criticism by writing him so many letters in defense of the show that he decided to give it a second chance. Barnes returned to the theater for a second inspection of the show, and published a reappraisal in the *New York Times*, stating that the musical had been tightened, and the ending markedly improved. He noted Cryer and Ford’s “courage in keeping going after a moderately unfavorable press.”³⁰²

The Book: Setting, Plot Synopsis, and Characters

The freedom to communicate one’s truth and live by it in the face of resistance is the primary theme in *Now Is the Time*. Mike Butler is the story’s protagonist, and the action revolves around the impression he makes on the students, co-teachers, and other townspeople. The show features multi-dimensional women who attempt to resolve and

³⁰⁰ Ford, scrapbook materials, Richard Watts, Jr., “Civil Disobedience With Music,” *New York Post*, date unknown. As an example, Watts mentions the “bright and cheerful musical numbers,” and adds, “the bright songs kept interrupting the grave proceedings.”

³⁰¹ Ford, scrapbook materials, Clive Barnes, “Theater: Social Significance to Music,” *New York Times*, September 27, 1967.

³⁰² Ford, scrapbook materials, Clive Barnes, “Theater: Reappraisal,” *New York Times*, date unknown.

express conflicting thoughts and feelings. The females are diverse and vividly painted working class characters, and a close reading of the book reveals their personality traits and motivations. Sarah Larkin, a music teacher, is at first a nervous and rather uneducated rule follower, who worries about people and wants to take care of them. As her confidence grows through Mike Butler's private tutelage, she begins to overcome her fears, ask direct and honest questions, speak up for herself, and express her desires to experience life. Eugenie Seldin, Sarah's sister and a waitress, is a self-absorbed distorter of truth. She is insecure about her lack of education, and protects herself by being insensitive, apathetic, defiant, or irreverent in her communication. Ramona, a friend of the antagonist's son, Tommy Heller, outshines him by being an energetic student and quick learner. She is an opinionated boundary pusher, and a bit of a tease, yet is a loyal, encouraging, and life-affirming friend to Tommy.

Cryer neutralized any strong negative audience reactions that could be directed toward the narrow-minded townspeople by providing actors with lighter character descriptions. The primary antagonist, high school coach Herbert Heller, is noted to be a "funny, jolly hail-fellow-well-met with just a hint of hostility." The high school principal, Albert McKinley, is to be played with a "jovial gusto and warmth, which overshadow his weakness." At her entrance, Eugenie—Sarah's unruly, husband-stealing sister—is described as "vibrating to a rock-and-roll beat." Directions caution actors for Coach Heller and Eugenie to avoid being "too heavy."³⁰³ Cryer's decision to incorporate humor and romance in the plot averted a direct criticism of her own hometown and upbringing, and kept the audience receptive to a message of individuality and moral resolve. The

³⁰³ Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford, *Now Is the Time for All Good Men* (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1967).

rural town setting made the point, however, that conflicts over American involvement in Vietnam could occur in every corner of the nation.

Cryer drew from her own tiny Indiana town in her setting's description: "a midwestern small town during a transitional time in the 60s: a town steeped in the past, resisting any diversity, where people were hanging on to a way of life that was being threatened by outsiders."³⁰⁴ Projections presented scenes from the town that changed with the unfolding action: a graveyard, a farmhouse and crops, a highway, a canning factory, a church, a school, and even photographs of people.

The personal experience of Cryer's brother, and his rejection by their hometown community, informs the story. Mike Butler arrives in a small Indiana town to teach English at the high school. He has served jail time for refusing to kill in Vietnam, and secures the teaching position only through the graces of the high school's principal, Albert, who thinks highly of Mike's father. As a non-conformist, Mike avoids traditional teaching methods and challenges his students to think for themselves. Sarah becomes his private student and love interest—a situation that conflicts with the desires of the school principal who hopes to marry her. Mike is bait for Sarah's sister, Eugenie, who had an affair with Sarah's now deceased husband. Mike is a role model for Tommy, coach Herbert Heller's son, who ponders whether he could kill a man in war. Mike eventually becomes a target for the community at large, who would prefer to keep things in town the way they have always been. As mentioned above, Mike was shot and killed by Coach Heller when the show first opened. After revisions, he is forced to leave town after a public shaming due to his time in jail, and advocacy of being true to oneself.

³⁰⁴ Cryer and Ford, "Song Is You!"

Representation through Musical Eclecticism

Ford's score for the twenty songs in *Now Is the Time* vary in style to accommodate the ever-shifting action and moods of the story. Romantic ballads, stoic hymns, bouncy pop or country tunes, barbershop harmonies and counter melodies, dance idioms, and military marches push the narrative forward or poke fun at small-town traditions through mimicry and parody. In the late 1960s, new trends included "more adult images and ideas" and "a move to include rock and other popular styles in scores."³⁰⁵ Although the show did not have a rock score, some critics assumed its presence. Linda Winer even suggests that Cryer and Ford were pioneers due to their inclusion of rock. Ford clarifies, however, "we were still in kind of the Rodgers and Hammerstein vein at that particular time."³⁰⁶ Ford notes that she did compose two rock songs for the character of Eugenie: "What's a Guy Like You Doin' in a Place Like This?" which emanated from a diner jukebox, and "Stuck-Up," which came from a boom box Eugenie carried around with her.³⁰⁷

Ford's music includes romantic songs in line with the Rodgers and Hammerstein model that dominated American musical theater between 1950 and 1975. Theater commentator Ethan Mordden describes the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein as book-heavy musical plays, or dramas in music, in which the book defines the situation that leads to a song that expresses the emotions of a character.³⁰⁸ A quick survey of

³⁰⁵ Block, "Musical theater," Section 8.

³⁰⁶ Cryer and Ford, interview by Winer.

³⁰⁷ Nancy Ford, email correspondence to author, October 4, 2018. "What's a Guy Like You Doin' in a Place Like This?" was in the production, but not on the cast album.

³⁰⁸ Mordden, *Anything Goes*, 213.

characteristics Mordden presents shows how *Now Is the Time* follows several Rodgers and Hammerstein conventions. The show's setting in rural Indiana conforms to the idea to "develop each story's community background, its culture and mores." The character of Mike represents the idea to "write about people whose lives have meaning." Mordden also identifies "The First Couple" (here, Mike and Sarah) and "The Second Couple" (here, Tommy and Ramona).³⁰⁹ Musically, a three-character number from Mike, Sarah, and Eugenie in Act One illustrates the plan to "anchor the score with character traction."³¹⁰

An explanation of the terms "diegetic" and "nondiegetic" clarifies how Cryer and Ford first began to distance their work from the conventions of the book musical, which typically incorporate nondiegetic songs and music. Many of the numbers in *Now Is the Time* are nondiegetic numbers that seem to be happening for the first time, while others are diegetic. Scott McMillin calls nondiegetic songs "out of the blue numbers," which arise "when characters burst into a song . . . [and] are forms of spontaneous expression by the characters."³¹¹ Diegetic numbers include "backstage musicals" (a show within a show), or other situations in which numbers are called for as performances in the book; for example, when characters perform numbers for other characters.³¹²

The terms are more commonly used in the film industry, and author Claudia Gorbman explains that diegetic music arises from a source within the movie's narrative,

³⁰⁹ Mordden, *Anything Goes*, 158.

³¹⁰ Mordden, *Anything Goes*, 161.

³¹¹ McMillin, *Musical as Drama*, 112.

³¹² McMillin, *Musical as Drama*, 103.

and nondiegetic music lacks a narrative source.³¹³ Diegetic music is sometimes referred to as source music, meaning that the viewer can observe the sound's source, or point of origin, as opposed to nondiegetic underscoring, where the source is unseen. Broadway musical supervisor, Rob Berman, explains an important difference between the terminology's usage for film and the stage. In stage musicals, nondiegetic does not necessarily mean unseen, and applies to characters who present their thoughts and emotions through song. He uses an example from the musical theater adaptation of the film musical, *White Christmas*, to compare the two terms.

Diegetic music in a show is music or a song where the character . . . is actually singing a song or making music. . . . "Sisters" would be diegetic because the characters are actually performing a number in the club. "Falling Out of Love Can Be Fun" is nondiegetic (as are most songs in musicals) because it is the convention of characters singing their thoughts or feelings.³¹⁴

Cryer and Ford provide various diegetic numbers in *Now Is the Time*. Eugenie, who typically appears with her transistor radio, performs a rollicking bubblegum pop song called "Stuck-up." Eugenie, and her enjoyment of the radio and its song, has a prototype in the character of Lolita in Stanley Kubrick's 1962 film of the same name. Lolita's depiction in the movie, and especially in the publicity photos, is that of an attractive and inviting young female, clad in a bathing suit, who listens to a catchy but simplistic song on her transistor.³¹⁵ Eugenie's number includes a spelling out of the title, as in Connie Francis's "V-A-C-A-T-I-O-N" (1962), Aretha Franklin's "R-E-S-P-E-C-T" (1967), and Tammy Wynette's "D-I-V-O-R-C-E" (1968). Other instances of diegesis

³¹³ Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 22-23.

³¹⁴ Rob Berman, email correspondence to author, October 7, 2018.

³¹⁵ McQuiston, *We'll Meet Again*, 52. McQuiston writes, "The song is the apathetic, vacuous stuff a teenager in the 1960s might listen to."

occur when the choir sings hymns, Coach Heller sings Christmas carols, and townspeople sing campfire songs—all examples of the characters’ awareness of performing the music.

“All Alone” is the show’s march-like anthem. Scholar Katherine Spring observes that theme songs may repeat over the course of a narrative, in order to accrue meaning through associations with different characters.³¹⁶ Mike introduces the song to Tommy to support his belief that life should not be lived by someone else’s rules. Tommy and Ramona reprise the song when Tommy tells her he needs to live his life on his own terms. A quintet sings the number a final time, each expressing individual attitudes. As in opera and musicals such as *West Side Story*, the quintet provides an opportunity to hear many characters’ conflicting emotions at the same time.

Ford’s reference to Rodgers and Hammerstein shows her awareness of a debt to previous musicals, and in fact *Now Is the Time* most closely resembles a popular 1957 Broadway musical by another composer: *The Music Man* by Meredith Willson.³¹⁷ Although *Now Is the Time* has a more serious tone and a less optimistic ending, the musical numbers bear many similarities to the array of old-fashioned numbers in *The Music Man*.³¹⁸

³¹⁶ Katherine Spring, *Saying It With Songs: Popular Music and the Coming of Sound to Hollywood Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 97-98.

³¹⁷ Accessed September 20, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/the-music-man-2664/#songs>. Many thanks to my advisor, Dr. Kate McQuiston, for recognizing the musical similarities between *Now Is the Time* and *The Music Man*.

³¹⁸ There are many other similarities that relate to the book and characters: Both settings are in fictional Midwestern towns (in the home states of Cryer and Willson); both have assertive men from outside of town who harbor a secret and who fall in love with a provincial small town woman; both women are musical (Sarah teaches music and Marian teaches piano) and have other men pursuing them; both shows have a young romantic couple; both towns are filled with naïve town-folk that include gossiping women and pompous men, along with a few male authority figures; both have scenes involving school teachers and school boards; and both feature a town event (a Centennial celebration and a dance social).

Cryer and Ford introduce the new teacher, Mike, to the other schoolteachers in a bouncy, sing-song-y number, “Keep ’em Busy, Keep ’em, Quiet,” which parodies the teachers and their advice to Mike through the use of a syllabic, homorhythmic, and repetitive melody line. Mike sings a smooth, melodic response that quickly establishes him as calm and grounded. In the introduction of Mike’s first ballad, “What’s in the Air?” Ford sets Cryer’s lyrics syllabically to suggest Mike’s impression of the simplicity of the small town: “Right at the core, the middle of the map / Smack in the fat cornucopious lap of America, America.” The song foreshadows upcoming march numbers that satirize several overly zealous town residents. The piano’s rapid chromatic descent forecasts Mike’s impending doom on the final line, “Guess I’ll take a great big breath and see what’s in the wind for me.” A similar piece in *The Music Man* is the patter song, “(Ya Got) Trouble,” that establishes Harold Hill’s relationship with the townspeople of another small Midwestern town.

The comparisons with *The Music Man* persist through romantic ballads in waltz-time, love duets, a march redolent of “Seventy-Six Trombones,” and an up-tempo number that possesses the same enthusiasm that drives the music and lyrics in “The Wells Fargo Wagon.” Primarily in romantic ballads, Cryer and Ford utilize the nondiegetic tradition to capture the emotion of a moment by setting dialogue where “people suddenly start singing ‘what they’re thinking.’”³¹⁹ Sarah’s romantic ballads, “Tea in the Rain” and “He Could Show Me,” idealize a new way of life in a manner comparable to Marian’s songs, “Goodnight, My Someone” and “My White Knight.” Sarah and Mike’s love duet, “Rain Your Love On Me,” mirrors Hill and Marian’s duet, “Till There Was You,” and a duet between Sarah and the school principal, “A Simple Life,” closely matches the mood

³¹⁹ Cryer and Ford, interview by Stitt.

of “Till There Was You.” *The Music Man*’s familiar march, “Seventy-Six Trombones,” is matched by two in *Now Is the Time*. In the satirical “It Was Good Enough For Grandpa,” a snare drum roll and strong duple meter rhythm brings the characters marching onto the stage, where they spit out the folksy syllabic lyrics: “It was good enough for Grandpa / And it’s good enough for me / I wish that we was livin’ / The way we used to be / The days when men was men / And women knew their place / The days when things was better / For the whole American race.” The number becomes quite complex with continuously added voices and several modulations, and Ford interweaves a countermelody with the men singing, “My country, firm and strong, that’s my country / my country right or wrong, it’s my country.” The comical effect of the overly elaborate number signals a mockery of paternalistic thinking, and Cryer’s lyric, “and women knew their place,” is a tongue-in-cheek reference to sexism.

Ford and Willson both incorporate numbers with sustained countermelody. Willson includes two: a patter song that pairs the female townspeople singing “Pickalittle” with a male ensemble singing the countermelody “Good Night Ladies,” and a number that combines a barbershop rendition of “Lida Rose” with Marian’s gentle countermelody “Will I Ever Tell You?” Cryer and Ford’s “Halloween Hayride,” which begins with simulated horse clops, combines with *a cappella* barbershop harmonies in a relaxing folk song, “Katydid,” that includes an underlying male-voiced ostinato repeating the title. Cryer says she aimed to capture “that sound in August in Indiana. It was very pervasive.”³²⁰ The variety of musical styles Ford included in *Now Is the Time* supported

³²⁰ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

Cryer's assortment of characters, and added elements of realism and unpredictability to the story.

The Last Sweet Days of Isaac

The Alienation of Isaac

Cryer and Ford's musical, *Isaac*, combines two musicalized plays—*The Elevator* and *I Want To Walk To San Francisco*—and takes place in the present time in different locations. The mutual theme of the two playlets is Cryer and Ford's belief regarding the importance of one-on-one communication and personal connection in the age of advancing technology. Cryer explains, "*Isaac* had to do with the change in human sensibility from the primitive one where there was direct contact—one-to-one with a person or object—to the present society which deals with images as if they are the real thing."³²¹

The character of Isaac is thirty-three in the first play and an unspecified younger age in the second, and is a socially alienated victim of technology in both stories. Cryer states that in *The Elevator* Isaac is "a serious young man who is intent upon making every moment of his life into a work of art—and recording it."³²² He and a naïve young secretary, Ingrid, get stuck between floors in an elevator, and he decides to teach her how to live in the moment.³²³ In *I Want to Walk to San Francisco*, protestors Isaac and Alice have been arrested. They are in separate jail cells, each containing a television screen,

³²¹ Cryer, interview by Betsko and Koenig, 104.

³²² Cryer and Ford, "Song Is You!"

³²³ Cryer and Ford, "Performance and Storytelling Session."

and they can only communicate with each other and the rest of the world through the screen, or touch each other by touching the screen.

Production Summary and Critical Reception of *Isaac*

Isaac (January 26, 1970-May 2, 1971) debuted in off Broadway's Eastside Playhouse on Manhattan's Upper East Side, and ran 485 performances. The musical was Cryer and Ford's first major success in New York and earned Outer Critics Circle, Obie, and Drama Desk Awards.³²⁴ Ford's hometown newspaper, the *Kalamazoo Gazette*, noted that productions of the musical took place in San Francisco, Washington, Dallas, Cincinnati, and Chicago, as well as international cities including York, Brussels, Amsterdam, Rio de Janeiro, and Paris.³²⁵ The transfer of *Isaac*'s first section into a new musical in 1980 is discussed in the entry on *Shelter* below, and *Isaac* saw a production in London at the Old Vic during the 1971-1972 theater season, which ran for eight performances.³²⁶

Cryer recalls that producers Haila Stoddard and Mark Wright were eager to produce the play she had written, but wanted a second half for it, which took her a while

³²⁴ Accessed October 28, 2017, <http://www.lortel.org/Archives/Production/3188>. Awards include the 1970 Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Off-Broadway Musical; the 1970 Theatre World Award for the performance of Fredericka Weber; three 1970 Obie Awards including Distinguished Performance by Austin Pendleton, Distinguished Performance by Fredericka Weber, and Best Musical by Cryer and Ford; and Drama Desk Special Awards for Cryer and Ford, and for Pendleton for Outstanding Performance.

³²⁵ Ford, scrapbook materials, Don W. Carlson, "'Isaac' Composer Here for Show at 'K'," *Kalamazoo Gazette*, date unknown.

³²⁶ Dietz, *Off Broadway Musicals*, 249.

to formulate. She describes how Isaac represented her brother, the protestor, but was “filtered through a much more comic lens than in *Now Is the Time*.”³²⁷

Isaac was a critical success from the start, with reviewers describing it as “one of the delights of the season” and “an especially important theater event.” All of New York’s major critics agreed that the production was an enjoyable eccentricity, and the reviews praised every aspect of the show, calling the production “gorgeously ridiculous,” and “terribly intelligent and supermodern.” Richard Watts, Jr. from the *New York Post* understood that the form had moved beyond musical comedy, and labeled it an “unpretentious musical play” that had a “simple little story spinning along gracefully and with unfaltering comic imagination.”³²⁸ Walter Kerr wrote that the show was the first time in his experience he felt the book was as good as the music.³²⁹

Clive Barnes, who had given *Now Is the Time* a second chance, grasped the humor in *Isaac*, and called it “one of the most preposterous shows in New York and yet also one of the happiest.” He seems captivated by Cryer’s “strange, interesting mind,” and goes beyond a mere plot description and points to “the insight Miss Cryer is showing into our all-recorded, all-documented society.”³³⁰ Barnes also enjoyed the music, particularly the “amiable quintet of musicians” (The Zeitgeist instrumentalists), and the

³²⁷ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

³²⁸ Ford, scrapbook materials, Richard Watts, Jr., “Two on the Aisle: A Bright Off-Broadway Surprise,” *New York Post*, February 7, 1970.

³²⁹ Ford, scrapbook materials, Walter Kerr, “My Favorite Rock Musical Thus Far,” *New York Times*, February 8, 1970.

³³⁰ Ford, scrapbook materials, Clive Barnes, “Theater: Happy Musical,” *New York Times*, January 27, 1970.

smooth arrangements. A year later, Barnes returned to the show and was even more impressed. He praised both Cryer and Ford and delved into the show's message:

The music is truly enchanting—Miss Ford can take a prolonged bow—but Miss Cryer has also done a great job in picking out so many contemporary trends and themes. Young people, for example, who use the camera and tape recorder as extensions of their senses, as confirmations of their realities . . . a couple finding eternity—and the losing it—in the time capsule of a stalled elevator . . . two other people searching for each other on television, two images trying to connect in reality . . . a pleasant yet, at times, strangely thought-provoking entertainment.³³¹

Although major critics lauded the show, Cryer felt that most of them overlooked the main themes and political implications. She recalls, “I got wonderful reviews and everybody thought it was hilarious but nobody took note of *what* I was writing *about*.” Cryer suggests that critics may have missed the point of the work due to expectations regarding musical theater because “people didn’t look for much meaning in musicals.”³³² In regard to thematic content, theatrical plays overshadowed musicals in New York theaters. Broadway musicals such as *Applause* starring Lauren Bacall, *Purlie* starring Melba Moore, and the light-hearted off-Broadway revival of *Dames at Sea* appealed to popular taste, and *Isaac* would not have conformed to audiences’ expectations.

An Absurdist Musical?

For *Isaac*, Cryer eschewed the traditional format of the book musical, and modeled a concept that evolved from the 1960s trend, “The Theatre of the Absurd.” Martin Esslin coined the term in his 1961 book of the same name, after feeling

³³¹ Ford, scrapbook materials, Clive Barnes, “Stage: ‘Isaac’ Enchants,” *New York Times*, January 9, 1971.

³³² Cryer, interview by Betsko and Koenig, 104.

impatience and “even rage” at Parisian theater critics for their inability to understand the plays that had moved him.³³³ Esslin believes that the absurdist themes found in the plays of Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter and others convey a “sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition.” He claims that absurdist playwrights do not argue about the absurdity itself, and instead, present the absurdity through “concrete stage images.”³³⁴

John Simon seems the most aware of the musical’s experimental and Absurdist nature. In the deepest inspection of *Isaac*, Simon wrote that the show, “both by its imagination and its workmanship, endeavors to continue and expand the theatre.” He seems so impressed by the second half that he adds merely: “The details and implications of this Kafkaesque and neo-Einsteinian hallucination defy both my space allotment and my comprehension.”³³⁵ Esslin provides an opportunity to consider Kafkaesque influences in *Isaac* through his discussion of Eugène Ionesco’s absurdist play, *Victims of Duty*. The principal character, Choubert, descends deeply into his subconscious and finds nothingness. Esslin explains: “Man *is* nothing because he has the liberty of choice and therefore is always that which he is in the process of choosing himself to be, a permanent potentiality rather than actual being.” Isaac’s attempts to record his life and his failure to connect with Ingrid relate to Ionesco’s work. According to Esslin, “Ionesco, like Kafka and Beckett, is primarily concerned with trying to communicate his own sense of being,

³³³ Esslin, *Theatre of the Absurd*, 11.

³³⁴ Esslin, *Theatre of the Absurd*, 23-25.

³³⁵ Ford, scrapbook materials, John Simon, “The Compleat Anger of Isaac Bernstein,” *New York*, February 9, 1970.

to tell the world what it feels like, what it means for him when he says, ‘I am’ or ‘I am alive.’”³³⁶

In the second play, Isaac is trapped in a jail cell, uncertain whether he is alive or dead, and there appears to be no salvation for him. Frederick R. Karl provides clarification for “Kafkaesque” and its frequent misuse: “Kafkaesque is when you enter a surreal world in which all your control patterns, all your plans, the whole way in which you have configured your own behavior, begins to fall to pieces. . . . What you do is struggle against this with all of your equipment, with whatever you have. But of course you don’t stand a chance.” Karl’s commentary fits Isaac’s situation: “History was going to roll over everybody. That’s Kafkaesque. You struggle against history and history destroys you.”³³⁷ Isaac’s situation is surreal, because he is a victim of media information about his death and has no way to interpret or control it. He tries unsuccessfully to speak to his mother during television news coverage from the event he sees himself protesting. Isaac and Alice are in separate jail cells and realize they can speak to each through televisions in their cells, but a special bulletin interrupts their conversation, and an announcer breaks in with: “My God, they ran over that boy! . . . He wasn’t even protesting anything. He was just lying there taking pictures with his movie camera.” Isaac, who is watching the newscast, realizes he is the boy, but then doubts what he sees. Isaac’s mother appears on the television screen, saying, “Isaac, this is your mother speaking: are you still there?” He responds: “Yes! Yes! I’m here! Mother! You can’t hear me, can you?” Technology does not provide direct communication.

³³⁶ Esslin, *Theatre of the Absurd*, 158.

³³⁷ Ivana Edwards, “The Essence of ‘Kafkaesque’,” *New York Times*, December 29, 1991, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/29/nyregion/the-essence-of-kafkaesque.html>.

Isaac's struggles do suggest a Kafkaesque situation; however, the darkness of and futility of Kafka does not pervade *Isaac* as a whole, and may exist more in the critic's imagination. Cryer expressed the show's dark humor primarily through Isaac: "a slight guy with wild hair, a bleating voice that cracks under pressure, a wacky grin, and limbs that shoot out at improbable angles." She says Pendleton defined the role, adding: "To see him swaggering around with grand assurance—a man with all the answers to the universe—was utterly incongruous. Isaac's passion is comic and his self-delusion is tragic."³³⁸ The comic elements rescue *Isaac*, and the insurmountable circumstances, which appear to trap Isaac and Alice at the show's conclusion, are negated by a rousing gospel number, "I Know I'm Alive."

Esslin makes a further point, applicable to Cryer and other playwrights in the 1970s and beyond, in his discussion on Brechtian theater, and its tendency to make the stage "a platform for social research and experimentation . . . for presenting the *external* reality of our world." He notes that the Absurdists staged "*internal psychological* reality." He reasons that post-Brechtian and post-Absurdist playwrights inherited both methods, along with other dramatic conventions, and could freely choose from a variety of devices, thus absorbing the Theatre of the Absurd into the mainstream.³³⁹ Michael Y. Bennett notes that female playwrights were "largely absent" from the movement in the 1950s and 1960s, but Absurdist writing found its way into "expression in female voices and visions of the absurd in the 1970s and 1980s."³⁴⁰ Cryer and Ford stand out as musical theater

³³⁸ Cryer and Ford, "Song Is You!"

³³⁹ Esslin, *Theatre of the Absurd*, 431-32.

³⁴⁰ Bennett, *Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of Absurd*, 119. Bennett discusses the works of Beth Henley, María Irene Fornés, and Caryl Churchill as examples of Absurdist-influenced plays.

writers who incorporated Absurdist elements commonly found only in the plays of the time.

Cryer's prescient warning about technology and its negative impact on interpersonal communication is even more timely today, when one considers the photographic, voice- and video-recording features on twenty-first century cell phones, and the ways in which many people now interact with electronic devices instead of each other.

Developing a Diegetic Musical

The themes of *Isaac* called for a contemporary style that necessitated a shift away from traditional nondiegetic Rodgers and Hammerstein-type numbers. Cryer and Ford took advantage of a trend in off-Broadway musicals that incorporated popular and rock music into their scores. Even though critic Walter Kerr declared *Isaac* his "favorite rock musical," Ford comments, "I've never been totally comfortable in the rock mode."³⁴¹ She explains that there was never an intention to call *Isaac* a rock musical, but the critics labeled it one, and when the quotations were picked up for advertising purposes, the label stuck.³⁴²

Cryer was aware that different compositional styles for musical theater were emerging. She says, "I remember going to *Hair* and thinking 'Musicals will never be the same again,' and *knowing* that Nancy and I had just ended up an era writing in the

³⁴¹ Cryer and Ford, interview by Stitt.

³⁴² Carmines, Ford, and Sweet, "On Theater Music," 152-53.

Rodgers and Hammerstein vein.”³⁴³ *Hair* had a subtitle: *The American Tribal Love Rock Musical*, and Scott Warfield says that the show was different from most musicals of the time, due to its “amplified rock style, with prominent bass lines and strong backbeats.” He notes, however, that most of the songs used the verse-chorus format Broadway musicals favored, and “remained within the bounds of what most Broadway audiences would accept.”³⁴⁴

All of the music in *Isaac* falls into the diegetic category, because in every instance of a song, Isaac, Ingrid, or The Zeitgeist realize they are “performing.” Some diegetic songs in the show are recorded into or listened to through a tape recorder. Ford further clarifies their musical distancing from nondiegetic music:

With *Isaac* we decided we definitely would not have any songs that didn’t have real justification, like the use of a tape recorder. . . . It was never sung dialogue—it was always a song. Once in a while the characters put something on the tape recorder for people to remember them by, but there’s never any place where somebody is talking along and then all of a sudden starts to sing instead of speaking.³⁴⁵

Cryer’s book for *Isaac* necessitated the use of diegetic music. Cryer agrees with Ford, saying, “We were intellectually justifying moving into music.”³⁴⁶ Cryer describes the character of Isaac as a poet who imagines his life being conveyed by music. Isaac, feeling certain moments of his life would be better expressed in song, suddenly starts singing, fully aware of the fact. Stuck in the elevator with Ingrid, Isaac asks her to sing as well. The Zeitgeist, as a trio of singers and band of five instrumentalists, functions as a

³⁴³ Cryer and Ford, interview by Stitt.

³⁴⁴ Warfield, “From *Hair* to *Rent*,” 238-39.

³⁴⁵ Carmines, Ford, and Sweet, “On Theater Music,” 151.

³⁴⁶ Cryer and Ford, interview by Stitt.

Greek chorus and provides musical commentary throughout the show. Cryer explains that the performance group sang thematically based songs while the drama on stage unfolded.³⁴⁷ They also speak the parts of the characters Isaac hears through his television set, and sing “Somebody Died Today,” which gives voice to Isaac’s thoughts. The placement of The Zeitgeist singers above the stage action and characters also reflects a society immersed in technology and alienated from one another.

The Book: Setting, Plot Synopsis, and Characters

Cryer’s themes and writing style reflect an emerging spirit of social consciousness in the Seventies that gave rise to new paths of personal expression. *Isaac*’s book did not focus on storytelling, as in *Now Is the Time*, but centered on two characters who were both, in different ways, seeking to validate their lives. Cryer, through her writing for *Isaac*, was stepping outside of the box and validating her own voice. She recalls people’s response to her writing for *Isaac*, and notes, “It didn’t *seem* as if Gretchen would have had that wry point of view about that kind of intellectual man. You would never have suspected that wryness from my smiling persona at the time.”³⁴⁸ Cryer’s ideas were apparently brimming on the surface of her consciousness, because she recalls writing the first playlet of *Isaac*, initially called *The Encounter*, in a day.³⁴⁹

The show combines two separate plays that use the same set. The original manuscript notes that the action “takes place on the raked floor of three connected cubes

³⁴⁷ Cryer and Ford, interview by Stitt.

³⁴⁸ Cryer, interview by Betsko and Koenig, 108.

³⁴⁹ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

constructed with polished aluminum bars.”³⁵⁰ Part I is in the center cube on a plexiglass floor dimly lit from beneath to provide light for the scene when elevator lights go out. In Part II, the opening scene in which a policeman arrests Alice is in the center cube, and the two outer cubes become prison cells with bars at the back of each cell. The downstage corner of each cell, far left and far right, contains a television set viewed by Isaac and Alice. A small TV camera is suspended at the front of each cell into which Isaac and Alice speak. The Zeitgeist is suspended above the action at the back of the stage area and behind and above the cubes.³⁵¹

Marshall McLuhan, author of *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, influenced Cryer’s views on technology and the human condition, and provides a context for understanding the themes in *Isaac*. In the 1960s, McLuhan was a renowned author and philosopher who examined relations between humans and technology in the emerging world of electronics. He analyzed many forms of communication to alert the public about the implications of technology for human society, and espoused the theory that any technology can, over time, create a totally new human environment. McLuhan wrote his book to explain the “never-explained numbness that each [media] extension brings about in the individual and society.”³⁵² McLuhan biographer, Terrence Gordon, observes that McLuhan’s “starting point is always the individual, because he defines media as technological extensions of the body.”³⁵³

³⁵⁰ Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford, *The Last Sweet Days of Isaac*, 1969, manuscript, New York Public Library, Performing Arts Research Collection.

³⁵¹ Cryer and Ford, *Last Sweet Days of Isaac*.

³⁵² McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 6.

³⁵³ Terrence Gordon, July 2002, accessed October 27, 2018, <https://www.marshallmcluhan.com/biography>.

Cryer's interest in McLuhan's teachings alerted her to experiences in her personal life. Ford recalls Cryer describing an encounter with a man at a lunch counter that had a large mirror hanging in front of it. Cryer and the man communicated with each other only through the mirror, even though they were seated next to each other—communicating with the image rather than “the thing itself.”³⁵⁴ A *New York Times* article confirms Cryer's alignment with McLuhan's prophetic ideas: “He has seen that as we become more and more extended by the media, we use less of ourselves and finally diminish to the point where we are no longer sure we exist.”³⁵⁵ Cryer manifested McLuhan's ideas through the character of Isaac. In Part I, Isaac is approaching his thirty-third year—the year he believes he will die.³⁵⁶ Desperately trying to find the meaning in his life and somehow validate himself, he makes his stage entrance with a 35-millimeter camera around his neck, and carries a guitar case, and a trumpet case. He also totes a briefcase with a tape recorder and microphone he uses to record his days. Isaac humorously shows how people can become so consumed with documenting their lives through the use of recorders and cameras, that they forget to live and connect with other human beings. A younger Isaac opens Part II, with Isaac pondering what he has become in Part I: “Someday they may figure out a way to put a whole life on tape. . . . And you could experience a tape of someone else's life. And would that be like actually being with the

³⁵⁴ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

³⁵⁵ Ford, scrapbook materials, Beatrice Berg, “From School Days to Sweet Days,” *New York Times*, February 15, 1970.

³⁵⁶ One idea that might explain Isaac's fatalistic vision of dying at the age of 33 is the number's connotation with Jesus, who some believe died at that age.

person?” In the end, Cryer’s use of the medium of television leaves Isaac pondering whether he is alive or dead.

McLuhan described recorded sound (e.g., Cryer’s inclusion of a tape recorder) as “a unified field of instant relationships [that] lends it a near resemblance to the world of electro-magnetic waves.” He describes the phonograph (recorded sound) as “an extension and amplification of the voice that may well have diminished individual vocal activity.”³⁵⁷ In other words, he believes electro-magnetic waves become more powerful than the voice itself, and thus limit it, leading to impaired communication, or problems in self-expression.

Cryer’s use of television sets in the jail cells of Isaac and Alice in Part II closely reflects McLuhan’s views. McLuhan calls the effect of TV “the most recent and spectacular electric extension of our central nervous system,” which has “affected the totality of our lives, personal and social and political.”³⁵⁸ McLuhan provides an example of what he calls the “fascinating and involving power of television,” when he describes the impact on television viewers of the moment that Jack Ruby shot Lee Harvey Oswald. He adds that the Kennedy assassination footage illustrates the power of television to grip a person deeply, yet induce “a numbing effect as deep as grief, itself.”³⁵⁹

A careful reading of the original manuscript provides a deeper understanding of Isaac, and the two female characters, Ingrid in Part I and Alice in Part II. In Part II, one of The Zeitgeist plays the policeman although he does not sing in the role, and The Zeitgeist

³⁵⁷ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 275-76.

³⁵⁸ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 317.

³⁵⁹ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 335.

singers perform from their platform as the voices for the newscast characters, which include Isaac's mother, Mrs. Bernstein.³⁶⁰

As in *Now Is the Time*, the female characters exhibit personal strength. In *The Elevator* (Part I) Ingrid and Isaac are trapped in a dark elevator, and Ingrid appears to be masked and fearful of life. One of her first lines is "Oh, God, what if we plunge down the shaft!" She soon reveals that she has a feisty side when she tells Isaac, "Take that superior smile and stuff it, mister!" She tells Isaac she is a secretary, but wants to be a poet, and hiding under her wig and makeup is a powerful woman wanting to live life fully. Her conversation with Isaac helps her realize that the important moments in her life are passing by, and when Isaac warns her she had better seize the moment and make love to him in case the elevator crashes, she realizes, "I can't die now. I haven't really lived yet." Isaac reveals his insecurities when Ingrid calls out for her lover, and he insists, "You love me, baby! Me, me!" and shares his desire to be with "someone who could have understood my life and my death." When the elevator returns to service, Isaac, who has deemed himself "a life poet," tells Ingrid, who has declared her desire to be one, that she will never achieve her goal. After Isaac leaves, Ingrid listens to the tape recorder left behind and hears her voice say: "I'm not living, Isaac. In the moment, I mean." She sings, "I must try to touch the moment while I have it somehow." At the end of *The Elevator*, we realize that Ingrid will do her best to live her life in the moment, and Isaac is incapable of practicing what he preaches. Cryer's portrayal of Isaac and his rapid turnover of emotions implies that he lacks the ability to accept himself and his life as they are. He projects his weakness onto the woman, but Ingrid does not succumb. Through the

³⁶⁰ Cryer and Ford, *Last Sweet Days of Isaac*.

character of Ingrid, Cryer upstages the male with a female who is determined to live life on her own terms. In this instance, the woman is the central objector and hero in the drama, and this characterization of female empowerment manifests again in *Shelter* and *I'm Getting My Act Together*.

In *I Want To Walk To San Francisco* (Part II), Alice lays limp at a protest, and tries to make a personal connection with the police officer arresting her. She tells him, "I can't live in solitary. I'll die, Henry." Later, in separate jail cells, Alice and Isaac do not realize at first that they can communicate through their television screens. When they finally understand that they can, they kiss the screens passionately.³⁶¹ Isaac disconnects from Alice when he views his death on the news, and ponders whether he is actually dead. Alice becomes frightened and asks, "Isaac, where are you?" When he reconnects with Alice, he asks her if she knows he is there, and she asks him how he knows she is actually there. She tells him, "Lately I've been losing a certain . . . sense of myself . . . What's happening to us?" They agree to stay together, although in separate cells, and when Isaac asks her if they can live that way, all Alice can say is, "We can adjust to this world . . . a person can adjust to anything." Because Isaac is a dozen or so years younger in Part II, one can assume that his feeling of isolation and fear of death results in the character we met in Part I. The older Isaac in Part I has become a neurotic man who tries to control women because he cannot find himself. A fitting McLuhanism for the end of *Isaac* is: "With (telephone and) TV it is not so much the message as the sender that is

³⁶¹ Many thanks to Dr. Abigail Fine, for pointing out that *Isaac* appeared a decade before *Videodrome*, a film that examined a similar relationship to technology and was hailed as a "first" for doing so. Fine notes that *Videodrome* became known for portraying a sexual relationship with a screen, which is another idea that appears in *Isaac*.

‘sent’.”³⁶² McLuhan warns of the danger of losing a sense of self, by succumbing to the messages of television media.

New Musical Formats

Comments from Cryer and Ford suggest that the songs for *Isaac* flowed organically, and led to innovations in their working process. Cryer describes her lyric-writing process, saying, “Quite often I’m writing the book and it just moves into the lyric, even if it’s not sung dialogue. . . . Nearly always the lyrics tumble right out.”³⁶³ Ford explains: “There were really all different styles of music in *Isaac*. A lot of Gretchen’s ideas touch a chord in me. If they didn’t, I couldn’t write anything because if I don’t feel it or understand it, then I don’t even have any musical ideas for it.”³⁶⁴ Ford maintains that she has not analyzed her musical style, does not know if she has particular melodic or harmonic tendencies, and says that any such tendencies would be “more instinctive than intellectual.”³⁶⁵ Although many of their songs have a soft-rock sensibility, Ford found opportunities for gospel, country western music, and other styles.

In a traditional musical, the principle characters alternate solos, or sing duets to express their inner thoughts and emotions. In *Isaac*, Cryer and Ford departed from the use of a conventional chorus, such as the group of townspeople that were integrated into the action of *Now Is the Time*. The *Zeitgeist* was positioned to voice both the action and the characters. Jeff Sweet, a critic-writer-composer and contemporary of Cryer and Ford,

³⁶² Accessed October 27, 2018, <https://www.marshallmcluhan.com/mcluhanisms/>.

³⁶³ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

³⁶⁴ Cryer and Ford, interview by Stitt.

³⁶⁵ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

jokingly calls the second act of *Isaac* “heresy” due to its break from musical theater conventions, and stated: “These chorus people (The Zeitgeist) were an entirely different entity; they were not a part of what was actually happening in the show.”³⁶⁶

The Music: Survey of Production Numbers

An overview of the music reveals a diversity of styles in *Isaac*, similar to the eclecticism found in *Now Is the Time*. In Part I, “The Elevator,” The Zeitgeist substitutes for a traditional chorus, and reflects the characters’ voices rather than their own thoughts. Isaac opens with the title number, “The Last Sweet Days of Isaac,” which utilizes a soft rock beat to accompany his words. He narrates his personal story to the audience, rather than conveying inner emotion. He sings that he is thirty-three, and he believes he is going to die, and at the song’s end, he ponders, “Where will I be when darkness descends on me?”

Another of Isaac’s numbers includes a short recited poem: “a transparent crystal moment / when your life was suspended / like a dewdrop in the spider web / of time and space.” Judith Sebesta notes that Ford considers some of her settings “almost baroque rock,” which Sebesta attributes primarily to the use of an electric harpsichord in “A Transparent Crystal Moment.”³⁶⁷ Ford explains: “I didn’t set out to write ‘baroque,’ but I became aware that chord progressions and accompaniment patterns were sounding Bachian—possibly the first instance being in “A Transparent Crystal Moment.”³⁶⁸ The

³⁶⁶ Carmines, Ford, and Sweet, “On Theater Music,” 161-62.

³⁶⁷ Sebesta, “Social Consciousness,” 206n.

³⁶⁸ Nancy Ford, email correspondence to author, September 27, 2018.

Zeitgeist sings the first two lines, and Isaac joins them on the last two, in a style that suggests the mellow, folk-rock sounds of Simon and Garfunkel's "Cecilia" or "Mrs. Robinson."

Ford included unusual instrumentation to create a special feeling for Ingrid's solo, "My Most Important Moments." A newly developed keyboard instrument, the "Rock-si-chord," emulated various sounds, including those of a hurdy-gurdy and a calliope.³⁶⁹ The old-fashioned instruments suggest Ingrid's nostalgic view of her past, and fear that she is letting her life slip by without living it. At first her timid voice matches the delicacy of the waltz. All four stanzas contain varying numbers of textual lines of different lengths that suggest a lack of control over her life, and the lyrics contain imagery of the past. In the first stanza, Cryer's lyrics reference a hand-cranked stringed instrument with the lines: "I hear the hurdy-gurdy of a time that is past / A time that didn't last." The final stanza references a calliope, which is a much louder instrument. Ingrid's voice grows increasingly stronger, and by the end of the song, she grabs the microphone and sings in a bold Broadway belt: "I must try to touch the moment while I have it / Somehow." Ingrid offers a gentle reprise of the final lines of "My Most Important Moments" at the show's conclusion to help the audience understand she plans to change.

In a rare instance of musical quotation, Ford used a *leitmotiv* from Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* to set the word "Liebestod" in Isaac and Ingrid's number "Love You Came To Me." The scene and singing of "Liebestod" parodies the final moments of Wagner's music drama when Isolde sings "Liebestod" over Tristan's dead

³⁶⁹ Nancy Ford, email correspondence to author, September 29, 2018. Ford explains, "I chose the harpsichord (Rock-si-chord) after I realized that some of the music had a baroque flavor."

body.³⁷⁰ Ford suggests that the word *Liebestod* also reflects the sometimes pretentious nature of Isaac.³⁷¹ Isaac opens the song with three descending chromatic repetitions of “Liebestod,” and the music continues with a soft rock beat. By the song’s end, Ingrid has joined Isaac in the final chorus and the singing of the word “Liebestod” six times, and The Zeitgeist’s lead female singer, Louise Heath, sings an operatic florid soprano line.³⁷²

In Part II of *Isaac, I Want To Walk To San Francisco*, The Zeitgeist performs in all seven numbers, and Isaac and Alice join in on four. Ford believes that the title song, “I Want To Walk To San Francisco,” is “about touching—really actually touching—the earth, and again it’s about living in the moment.”³⁷³ The Zeitgeist opens with “I Want to Walk to San Francisco,” which features a driving, syllabic setting of the text that proclaims that time and space are immeasurable without the ability to connect to the earth. The second half of the short song shifts to a minor key, and incorporates an aggressive, march-like percussion to drive home the idea that the speed of a jet is no substitute for walking and connecting: “I want to measure every mile against the length of my body / Feel the earth from here to there / Yes, feel it with my feet.” Isaac’s song, “Herein Lie the Seeds of Revolution,” has a strong beat, harmonies provided by The Zeitgeist, improvised riffs from the guitar, and lyrics that mention “the man in Washington,” IBM computers, and an electronic brain.

³⁷⁰ Isaac tells Ingrid *Liebestod* means “love death.” He believes he is going to die at any time, and wants to make love to Ingrid before he does.

³⁷¹ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

³⁷² Nancy Ford, email correspondence to author, September 29, 2018. Ford confirms the voice to be that of Louise Heath.

³⁷³ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

The Zeitgeist sings lyrics that reveal Isaac's thoughts as he watches himself on the news. "Somebody Died Today" is a country-western ballad, with rhythm guitar strums, vocal vibrato at the ends of lines, and harmonized male voices on vocables like "da da" and "me-ee-ee-ee." Isaac realizes: "Somebody's dying—I can see him in his last agony / Does anybody know this boy? Could someone tell me who he could be? / Hey ma—hey ma—jumping Jesus—he looks like me." The show ends with The Zeitgeist's female singer leading the group in a responsorial spiritual, with block chords on the piano. The piece is a soulful "hallelujah" praise song that includes vocal echoes on the lyrics "sweet words" and "sweet soul," and voices that linger on high notes and conclude on the highest pitch of the piece. The lyrics represent Isaac's—and everyone's—hope for salvation. The Zeitgeist concludes the show just as it started it, with a chorus of "I Want To Walk to San Francisco," and commences a mini-pop rock concert. Songs previously cut from the second act appeared in the concert, and the audience enjoyed the bonus performance.³⁷⁴ The addition of extra music is unique, and in Cryer and Ford's 1978 musical, *I'm Getting My Act Together*, they would incorporate the use of a rock group once again, this time to open the show.

Shelter

The Musical is the Message: "What is Reality?"

The primary theme of Cryer and Ford's next musical, *Shelter*, delved deeper into the issues of interpersonal connection and the risk of losing oneself through technological advances. Cryer describes *Shelter* as an extension of the idea in *Isaac*, "the difficult line

³⁷⁴ Cryer and Ford, "Song Is You!"

between the image and the thing itself.”³⁷⁵ Cryer deemed the basic premise of the show, creating your own reality using computer technology, a “fantastical metaphor.” Today, she reasons, the idea has become a reality.³⁷⁶ Cryer explains that the piece was about self-delusion: “I wrote this in the early seventies before people had home computers. The central idea was that this guy could program his whole environment, pretend it was real.”

Although Cryer does not specifically speak of McLuhan’s influence in her book for *Shelter*, she incorporates his ideas regarding the pervasive effect of technology on the human condition throughout the show. McLuhan’s views on various aspects of the media, which he would label the “extensions of man,” include clothing, photographs, newspapers, advertising, and games, and appear below.

In an early scene, Cryer adds an unusual page of dialogue in which the leading character, Michael, asks his new love interest, Maud, if she would like a bedtime story. He promptly retrieves a newspaper, and proceeds to read sections of an article that paraphrase lines from Jacque Monod’s 1970 book, *Chance and Necessity*: “Man knows at last that he is alone in the indifferent immensity of the universe whence he has emerged by chance. His duty, like his fate, is nowhere written. It is for him to choose between the kingdom and the darkness.”³⁷⁷ Cryer explains that Michael uses the premise of the book as a justification for creating his own reality, and calls Michael’s use of Monod’s writing

³⁷⁵ Kasha and Hirschhorn, “Gretchen Cryer,” 79.

³⁷⁶ Cryer and Ford, “Performance and Storytelling Session.”

³⁷⁷ Jacque Monod, *Chance and Necessity: An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 180. Monod’s final lines state: “Man knows at last that he is alone in the universe’s unfeeling immensity, out of which he emerged only by chance. His destiny is nowhere spelled out, nor is his duty. The kingdom above or the darkness below: it is for him to choose.”

“a lofty way to seduce Maud into his created world.”³⁷⁸ McLuhan’s take on newspapers and print media is: “The owners of media always endeavor to give the public what it wants, because they sense that their power is in the *medium* and not in the *message* or in the program.”³⁷⁹ In this case, Michael finds exactly what he needs to justify his life.

Production Summary and Critical Reception of *Shelter*

Shelter was Cryer and Ford’s first and only Broadway musical, and lasted a mere month, due to factors that likely included its subject matter regarding artificial realities. *Shelter* premiered at Playhouse in the Park in Cincinnati, Ohio, in June of 1972. Ford’s husband, Keith Charles, played the role of Michael, and Word Baker was the director.³⁸⁰ In 1973, the Broadway production of *Shelter* (February 6-March 3) began its thirty-one day run at the John Golden Theatre. Terry Kiser played Michael, and Austin Pendleton directed. Ricki Fulman writes that, due to the success of *Isaac*, producers Richard Fields and Peter Flood were eager to produce *Shelter* from its inception. Cryer comments: “Although it has simplified things—not having to drag around for a producer—there is more pressure, because we’re on Broadway now, and there’s more money riding on this.”³⁸¹ *Shelter*’s short run was a setback for Cryer and Ford, and surprised some industry professionals. Composer-lyricist Al Carmines, who remembered good reviews, was shocked when the show closed. The high cost of mounting a Broadway musical

³⁷⁸ Gretchen Cryer, email correspondence to author, October 19, 2018.

³⁷⁹ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 216.

³⁸⁰ Ford, scrapbook materials, *Shelter*, *Playbill*.

³⁸¹ Ford, scrapbook materials, Ricki Fulman, “This harmonious pair say it with music,” *Daily News*, February 2, 1973.

became a significant factor in determining *Shelter*'s fate. When Carmines asked Ford if she would blame the show's demise on critical response, she responded: "Not entirely. . . . There is a state of fear and state of people's pocketbooks right now that make them choose rather carefully what they go to see. They will go to see the one with the most exclamation points rather than the one that's warmly pleasant."³⁸² Again, audiences and critics were likely enamored by more extravagant Broadway musicals, such as Bob Fosse's *Pippin*, Gower Champion's *Sugar*, and Harold Prince's *A Little Night Music*.

Although *Shelter* had a short run, in 1980, Cryer and Ford created a hybrid production, *Isaac & Ingrid & Michael*, combining Part I of *Isaac (The Elevator)* with *Shelter*. The musical played at the Pepsico Summerfare in the Center of the Arts in Purchase, New York. *The Last Sweet Days*, a somewhat revised version of *Isaac & Ingrid & Michael*, opened at the York Theatre in Manhattan on April 6, 1997. On June 27, 2017, Feinstein's/54 Below revived the musical in two concert performances featuring Cryer's son, Jon, as Michael.

Clive Barnes recognizes a problem that pertains to audience expectations at the time. He noted: "People liking their Broadway musicals to be bold and brassy, will not take to 'Shelter.' But, people appreciating more of a chamber musical, intimate, even cozy, should find this a warmly pleasant evening."³⁸³ Barnes's labeling of *Shelter* as a chamber musical indicates that its foray onto the Broadway stage was probably a misstep.

A perusal of *Shelter*'s reviews in Ford's professional scrapbooks reveals that many critics admired Cryer and Ford's unique style but, as in *Isaac*, few of them

³⁸² Carmines, Ford, and Sweet, "On Theater Music," 158.

³⁸³ Clive Barnes, "Theater: 'Shelter,' Musical, Arrives," *New York Times*, February 7, 1973, <http://www.nytimes.com/1973/02/07/archives/theater-shelter-musical-arrives.html>.

attempted to understand or comment on the musical's message. This is in part due to the unwillingness of male reviewers and audience members to examine the psychological metaphor of a man living in an artificially created environment, oblivious to his emotional responsibility for his wife and family. Reviewers were familiar with Cryer and Ford's work due to the success of *Isaac*, and may have dismissed *Shelter* as being in the same vein, without discovering the musicals' differences, particularly the inclusion of a talking, singing computer. Clive Barnes favorably compared the two shows, noting the "amiable eccentricities" of *Isaac*, and suggesting that *Shelter* had "something of that same zany and disarming spirit to it."³⁸⁴ John Simon noted that Cryer's "witticisms and lyrics have an easy grace to them."³⁸⁵ Allan Wallach said that Cryer and Ford's musicals were not like other peoples', and noted: "they're tart, small-scaled and chock-full of ideas."³⁸⁶ Perhaps the "ideas" were too cerebral for a Broadway critic to quickly absorb.

Three critics commented on the eclectic music, although only one expressed his point of view about a singing computer that was featured in the majority of the numbers. Walter Kerr asserted: "I found myself becoming quite accustomed to the notion that all of the orchestration for the tunes was being provided by a companionable computer named Arthur, whose lights blinked in rhythm to the notes being churned out. . . . Before my very eyes all things human seemed to be going down, down, down."³⁸⁷ Kerr's comment

³⁸⁴ Ford, scrapbook materials, Clive Barnes, "Theater: 'Shelter,' Musical, Arrives," *New York Times*, February 7, 1973.

³⁸⁵ Ford, scrapbook materials, John Simon, "Trivia, Tried and Untried," *New York*, February 26, 1973.

³⁸⁶ Ford, scrapbook materials, Allan Wallach, "In Review/II, Stage: Tart and playful," *Newsday*, February 7, 1973.

³⁸⁷ Ford, scrapbook materials, Walter Kerr, "After an Amusing Premise, What?" *New York Times*, February 18, 1973.

resonates with McLuhan's claim that the introduction of a new technology creates a new reality. Barnes called the music "undemanding soft rock with lots of electronic sound." In an otherwise hostile review, Douglas Watts noted the "ingenious orchestrations, peppered with electronic effects."³⁸⁸ Wallach offered a broad description of the music, commenting that Ford matched Cryer's literary approach with a "lovely set of gently rocking pop songs, with a bit of country and a touch of tap tossed in."³⁸⁹

Voicing a Computer

Anyone who has experienced Stanley Kubrick's epic 1968 film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, can quickly conjure up a red-eyed image for the character named Hal (HAL 9000), a sentient computer who controls missions aboard the spacecraft Voyager One, bound for Jupiter. Musicologist Kate McQuiston draws attention to the importance of Hal's voice and its significations. She describes the type of voice Kubrick sought when casting an actor for Hal, who Kubrick wanted to sound like "the intelligent friend next door." McQuiston describes how the actor's subtle control of tone could turn "chillingly calm" in crucial scenes, such as Hal's refusal to open the pod bay doors.³⁹⁰

Shelter's sentient computer, Arthur, is a non-threatening people pleaser, with a sly sense of humor that serves as subtext for the action.³⁹¹ Ford describes Arthur as a metal

³⁸⁸ Ford, scrapbook materials, Douglas Watt, "A Whimsy-With-Music Called 'Shelter' Opens," *Daily News*, February 7, 1973.

³⁸⁹ Ford, scrapbook materials, Allan Wallach, "In Review/II, Stage: Tart and playful," *Newsday*, February 7, 1973.

³⁹⁰ McQuiston, *We'll Meet Again*, 13-14.

³⁹¹ Arthur's first line, a minute into the show, "Do you have a personal problem?" is spoken in the voice of a commercial announcer. Periodically during the action, Arthur recites commercial narratives that

box about the size of half a refrigerator.³⁹² An off-stage actor voices Arthur through a microphone connected to a speaker in the stage box, and the book describes Arthur as having the “friendly, man-to-man sound of a commercial voice-over.”³⁹³ Michael tells Maud that he always turns Arthur on when he comes home because it soothes him. He explains to her that his company installed electronic ears and an electronic voice in Arthur, and uses him to write jingles, and to produce lighting and sound effects.³⁹⁴ Hal has an even and controlled voice, which turns chilling as the drama unfolds. McQuiston notes that Kubrick compared his idea for Hal’s voice to that of Winston Hibler, who voiced advertisements for Walt Disney, making mediated voices the inspiration for both Arthur and Hal.³⁹⁵ The relationships that Hal and Arthur establish with other characters bear similarities. Hal initially befriends the two male astronauts, engaging in amiable conversation and even a game of chess with the protagonist, Dr. Frank Poole. Arthur, Michael’s best friend, cordially greets Michael’s female visitors, and chats, performs tricks, and sings rounds with Michael.

Hal also has the ability to sing. McQuiston describes his only song, “Daisy Bell,” as a death waltz that winds down through a slowing tempo and sinking pitches. She labels

comment on what is happening. At times, Michael tells him to “Cool it!” or threatens him, saying, “Arthur, I swear to God, I’ll turn you off. That’s schoolboy stuff. Jesus!”

³⁹² Nancy Ford, email correspondence to author, October 31, 2018.

³⁹³ Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford, *Shelter* (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1973).

³⁹⁴ Cryer and Ford, *Shelter*. Arthur provides a variety of audio effects, including nature sounds (wind, crickets, birdcalls, a tree falling), and special effects while performing tricks (carrot chewing, creaking door, broom-sweeping, and crashing-glass noises). He responds to Michael’s jokes with a laugh track.

³⁹⁵ McQuiston, *We’ll Meet Again*, 13.

the moment a “sour commentary on the human price of technology and its great risks.”³⁹⁶ Arthur, on the other hand, sings thirteen of the fifteen numbers in the original production, many of which are discussed in the show’s context below.³⁹⁷ Arthur serves a similar purpose to The Zeitgeist in *Isaac*—that of a commentator. While The Zeitgeist is distanced from the action, and often sings the thoughts of the characters or provides narrative details, Arthur is directly involved in the action (even though an offstage actor does the singing), and participates in the majority of the numbers, discussed below.

Arthur is in an unusual position as a diegetic phenomenon, which is necessary to make the offstage singing for the computer make sense by signaling that singing is happening. McLuhan’s *Understanding Media* did not contain an analysis of computer technology or artificial intelligence, except through the assertion that “computers hold out the promise of a means of instant translation of any code or language into any other code or language.”³⁹⁸ Rather, Arthur C. Clarke, who co-wrote *2001: A Space Odyssey* with Kubrick, provided a prescient interpretation of what computers might become, long before the arrival of Alexa, Google Assistant, and Siri. Arthur’s vocal presence permeates the music, and his interaction with different characters in different situations allows for stylistic variety. Cryer refers to Arthur as Michael’s “collaborator,” and he establishes individual relationships with all of the women in Michael’s life.³⁹⁹

When asked about the computer sounds that accompanied Arthur, Ford remarks that nobody has paid any attention to the genesis of them. Ford felt the computer should

³⁹⁶ McQuiston, *We’ll Meet Again*, 149. McQuiston notes that the inclusion of the song pays homage to the computer-synthesized voice of the IBM 7094 singing “Daisy Bell” in 1961.

³⁹⁷ Ford, scrapbook materials, *Shelter*, *Playbill*.

³⁹⁸ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 80.

³⁹⁹ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

have an electronic sound, and went to the New School in lower Manhattan to take a course on the ARP. She believes *Shelter* was the first show to use a synthesizer in the orchestra pit, and feels fortunate that she found a talented orchestrator, Tom Pierson, who was equally interested.⁴⁰⁰ Ford notes that Pierson pre-recorded Arthur's song, "Woman on the Run," due to its complexity.⁴⁰¹ An equally gifted operator named Ben Aronov worked the grid by switching small pegs to trigger the sounds.⁴⁰²

Ford maintains that her collaboration with orchestrator Thomas Pierson benefitted *Shelter*, and contributed to her artistic satisfaction. She considers writing song accompaniments equally important to composing melodies, and feels comfortable writing orchestrations for two or three instruments, but not for a larger number.⁴⁰³ *Shelter*, with its broader range of instruments, benefited from the Pierson's talents, and Ford describes the excitement of hearing an accurately orchestrated rendition of her ideas, and "knowing that you have *really* communicated with at least that one other person." Here, Ford reveals that communication itself offers a feeling of satisfaction that stems not only from an artistic connection with an arranger, but with Cryer, or an audience member who understands her musical message. She states, "That sense of total communication with one person is more exciting than reading a good review."⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁰ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

⁴⁰¹ Nancy Ford, email correspondence to author, September 29, 2018. Ford notes that Pierson used five individual ARP voices to create complex polyphonic segments of music.

⁴⁰² Nancy Ford, email correspondence to author, September 29, 2018. Ford notes, "It was a complex operation. You could use the keyboard to select the tones, but the sound quality had to be adjusted by moving the 'pegs' or knobs around on the grid. Even though I took a course in it at the New School in order to write for it, I could never have performed on it the way Ben did."

⁴⁰³ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

⁴⁰⁴ Carmines, Ford, and Sweet, "On Theater Music," 156-57.

The Book: Setting, Plot Synopsis, and Characters

The production of *Shelter* divided the set into two sections, both of which represent artificial environments. Half of the set is a studio used to make television commercials. The other half is the simulated living room of a modern house, complete with a baby grand piano, and a plastic plum tree.⁴⁰⁵

In addition to the omnipresent Arthur, Cryer created four distinct characters: Michael, Maud, Wednesday November (hereafter called Wednesday), and Gloria. The main character, Michael, is a television commercial writer who lives on a production set with Arthur, a talking and singing computer. With Arthur's help, Michael has created a synthesized existence in a world of self-delusion, cut off from anything real. Maud, who comes to the studio to film a commercial, is distraught because her husband has just left her, and she initially finds Michael fascinating. When Michael tells Maud about his wife, he says that when they met they "instantly became inseparable," although he lives apart from her. He shows Maud pictures of their seven adopted children who live in the country with his wife, yet calls fatherhood "the greatest thing that ever happened to me." He has clearly decided to avoid his family commitments by creating an artificial environment through his companion, Arthur. Michael lures Maud into his world and she spends the night, but the next morning Wednesday, the "cleaning lady" who is really Michael's mistress, arrives. Michael's wife, Gloria, soon enters the picture and observes what is going on. Maud ultimately realizes Michael's delusions, bonds with Wednesday, and both decide to leave. Gloria argues with Michael, and also departs. In the end,

⁴⁰⁵ Cryer and Ford, *Shelter*.

Michael appears to be content, left alone with his best friend, Arthur.⁴⁰⁶ Cryer and Ford eventually came to view Isaac and Michael as the same person.⁴⁰⁷ Like *Isaac, Shelter* focuses on a man who appears to be in control of his life but uses technology to hide from reality.

The women in the two shows, however, reveal some differences. In *Isaac*, Ingrid shows promising signs of change, but Alice remains confused and immobile. In *Shelter*, all three women walk away stronger than they are when they walk in. The women in *Shelter* have distinctive personalities, desires, and goals, yet stand together at the show's end when they realize that Michael uses them to serve his needs in his self-delusive world. As discussed in the critical commentary for *Shelter* (see Chapter One), Cryer uses the characters' voices to express women's issues, particularly relating to female objectification and subjugation by men.

Shelter opens with a scene in which Maud is rebelling against Michael's dialogue in the script that endorses Frisky Cooking Oil, which is "kindest to the softest parts of you." Her third line in the show is, "I feel like such an object."⁴⁰⁸ McLuhan's revelations on ads include his view that they are created "in the image of audience motives and desires," and he declares the advertising industry to be "a crude attempt to extend the principles of automation to every aspect of society."⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁶ Cryer and Ford, "Performance and Storytelling Session."

⁴⁰⁷ This realization led Cryer and Ford to combine the first act of *Isaac* and *Shelter* into the hybrid musical, *Isaac & Ingrid & Michael*, discussed below.

⁴⁰⁸ Fischer, "Image of Woman as Image," 70-84. The idea of female objectification reappears in *I'm Getting My Act Together*, in "Put in a Package and Sold," about creating an image for a performer, and "Miss America," which satirizes the beauty pageant.

⁴⁰⁹ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 226-27.

After reciting the commercial's motto, "Husbands prefer Frisky," Maud's frustrations break loose and interrupt the filming: she is distraught that her husband has just left her, and angrily vents that she is unheard and misunderstood. She rants about the commercial's sexual objectification and the corruption found in words ("I love you") and society ("values don't have anything to do with what people need"), and accuses Michael of perpetuating the corruption.

Michael brings Maud to his home on the studio set, introduces her to Arthur, and immediately joins him in several tricks and games to show off their compatibility and impress Maud. McLuhan suggests that games are another extension of the individual, and a dramatic model of our psychology that provides release from tension.⁴¹⁰ He notes that games "are contrived and controlled situations . . . that permit a respite from customary patterns."⁴¹¹ They provide Michael with a window to prepare for his next move. Michael, who needs to control his fabricated world, addresses Maud as "Penelope," even after she insists on being called by her real name. Cryer's choice reveals that Michael is unable to communicate honestly, and helps Maud realize that she is being manipulated by someone she barely knows.

Maud wavers between her passionate nature (she plays an intense classical piano piece in between commercial "takes"), and her vulnerable "inner self." She nostalgically believes her childhood was the "real thing," and in a moment of susceptibility, allows Michael to convince her to spend the night with him. McLuhan's ideology makes a brief appearance when Michael brings Maud a nightgown. McLuhan maintains, "nudity is the

⁴¹⁰ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 237.

⁴¹¹ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 243.

richest possible expression of structural form,” but “to the lopsided sensibility of industrial societies, the sudden confrontation with tactile flesh is heady music, indeed.”⁴¹² Maud turns a picture of the face of Michael’s wife, Gloria, to face the wall before bed. McLuhan suggests that to say “the camera cannot lie” underlines the “multiple deceits that are now practiced in its name,” and Michael has indeed invented a fantasy about Gloria being his “girl.” Arthur proceeds to create a beautiful night sky, with clouds drifting across a rising moon, and stars appearing. McLuhan’s discussion on the effects of the laser ray may reflect Arthur’s ability to project a perfect nighttime scenario. McLuhan states: “From the air at night, the seeming chaos of the urban area manifests itself as a delicate embroidery on a dark velvet ground.”⁴¹³

Maud eventually comes to understand Michael’s charade, and when she realizes her husband left her because she was non-confrontational, she breaks free from Michael’s influence and unleashes a diatribe, telling him, “I really want to harm you . . . I have such a rage!” At this point, Cryer’s humanistic side emerges, perhaps inspired by McLuhan’s own ideal: “The aspiration of our time for wholeness, empathy and depth of awareness is a natural adjunct of electric technology. . . . There is a deep faith to be found in this new attitude—a faith that concerns the ultimate harmony of all being.”⁴¹⁴ Maud declares Michael a “tragic figure,” and when Michael admits he is a “very fearful person,” Maud tells him, “It’s never too late to fling the doors wide open!”

Wednesday, a twenty-two year old “naïve child-woman and free spirit,” is Michael’s mistress, although he pretends she is his cleaning lady, and treats her as such.

⁴¹² McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 122.

⁴¹³ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 129.

⁴¹⁴ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 5-6.

She allows Michael to drive her crazy, because he is sometimes “so sweet” and sometimes “so cold.” She brings him gifts from nature, and is willing to sacrifice her dignity to save a little part of him that she believes is the real him. Maud, who has wised up, asks Wednesday, “How big would you say this one little true part is?” When Wednesday finds out how Michael took advantage of Maud, she finally rebels, explodes, chops down his artificial plum tree, and tells him to “bite it, Baby.”

Gloria, around forty, is Michael’s attractive, efficient, commanding, and desperate wife. She has learned to handle her fears, and make excuses to their children for his absence. She lists his many faults but says she would be bored if she were happy, and believes they need “the abrasiveness of each other.” After Maud and Wednesday leave, Gloria defends them to Michael, and exclaims, “maybe we should just end it.” She leaves, and Michael returns to his world with, “Cheers, Arthur.”

Maud, Wednesday, and Gloria all exhibit, at some point, a disturbing malleability that the audience likely perceived. None of the female characters are able to pull Michael out of his fabricated life, although Maud tries. Still, they succeed in removing themselves from his delusional world. The musical conveys a message for women to tend to their own needs, express their emotions, and be true to themselves, rather than allow a person to dictate their choices for them. The show also illustrates the theme of women supporting women. Both ideas reappear strongly in *I’m Getting My Act Together*, in moments shared by the character, Heather, and her two female back singers. In *Isaac and Shelter*, Ingrid, Maud, Wednesday, and Gloria move forward while Isaac and Michael remain unchanged, signaling the importance of authentic communication over the illusion of technology.

The Music: Survey of Production Numbers⁴¹⁵

Although Arthur sings continuously throughout the musical, Maud expresses the female voice in nine numbers compared to Michael's five. Cryer gives Maud the opening song, "Changing," and acknowledges her personal connection to the lyrics: "Twice I was a mother / Once I was a wife / Tore off all the labels / Now all that's left is life." Cryer says the song, in general, "has to do with that person that I was—that's not who I am today."⁴¹⁶ Her comment suggests that society often labels, and thus limits, people, and women in particular may accept those labels, and therefore limit themselves. Ford composed a smooth vocal melody, and the accompaniment alternates between a chain of short notes that emulate the ticking of a clock, primarily for the verses, and a series of wavelike arpeggios for the chorus: "And the changing / O the changing / Tomorrow, yes, I wonder who I'll be / Got a scrapbook filled with photographs / And none of them, not one of them, is me." The lyrics imply that changes occur for a person who is willing to move forward in life and take on new roles and challenges. Maud reveals her own nostalgic fantasy in her number, "Mary Margaret's House in the Country." Arthur has the ability to visually project any time or place upon request, and Maud chooses December 6, 1943 and her friend's farmhouse, saying, "life seemed so real then." The song opens with a simple monophonic instrumental melody, and features Maud's relaxed vocal solo over a bluesy piano accompaniment. Once again Arthur harmonizes with her at the song's conclusion. Later, Arthur again turns his attention to Maud, and adds a soothing counter melody to her intimate ballad, "Woke Up Today." After Maud and Wednesday

⁴¹⁵ Special thanks to Cryer and Ford for providing me with recording of the music from the original Broadway production of *Shelter* that was not professionally released.

⁴¹⁶ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

conclude that “that one little true part” of Michael is lost, they alternate verses and harmonize together in a pop ballad, “He’s a Fool.” Maud reprises a chorus of “Changing,” which segues into an easy-going ballad, “Goin’ Home With My Children.” The song builds when Arthur adds his harmonies, but returns to a soft monophonic conclusion by Maud.

Arthur produces music both on demand, such as playing baroque music through the push of a button, and on his own accord, such as bursting forth with a prerecorded television commercial. This, as well as his adaptability to people and situations, provides opportunities for musical eclecticism. The song, “Woman on the Run,” begins with a contorted series of monophonic “electronic” sounds from Arthur. The sounds reappear throughout the song, in which Arthur warns women to run or fly away. The chorus has a country twang and a bouncing bass line. By the song’s end, the underscoring becomes melodic, the electronic tone mellows, and Arthur creates a countermelody to harmonize with himself. Michael, however, has won Maud over, and “Don’t Tell Me It’s Forever” marches forwards to a big finish, as it spoofs the dramatic Broadway-style anthem in the style of “The Impossible Dream.” The number signals passion for Michael and Maud’s night ahead. Michael and Arthur unite in a Tin Pan Alley duet, “She’s My Girl,” to describe Michael’s wife, Gloria. Michael croons the lyrics, supported by a strumming banjo and a simple bass line, before he breaks into a song and dance routine straight out of a vaudeville revue. He and Arthur conclude the number in a brassy burlesque-style duet. The song gives the distinct impression that Michael’s relationship with his wife is

all an act.⁴¹⁷ After all three women leave Michael, Arthur concludes with “Sleep, My Baby, Sleep,” which provides a mystical harmonic language that ends on a deceptive cadence. Ford notes, “In that song, there is mystery, exploration of new possibilities, a sort of unreality,” and that the subtext contains an element of fear, even though the lyric is saying not to fear.⁴¹⁸ Over the accompaniment, Arthur sings: “There’s a world we’ve yet to see / Where we will make the answer / What is reality?” The show ends with this reflection on McLuhan’s warning against allowing technology to pervade life.

The Singer-Songwriter

New opportunities for female pop and rock musicians arose during the 1970s, particularly in response to the attention the female voice demanded in the era of second-wave feminism. The singer-songwriter movement brought many female music writers and performers into the popular music arena.

In 2016, *The Cambridge Companion to the Singer-Songwriter* established the singer-songwriter genre as a musical style worthy of scholarly attention. In the edition, researcher Rupert Till offers a basic definition of a singer-songwriter as a musician who writes and performs her or his own material.⁴¹⁹ He suggests that the term “singer-songwriter” describes more than a type of popular musician, and encompasses “a genre, an attitude, an ethos.”⁴²⁰ Till maintains that a key aim of a singer-songwriter is to present

⁴¹⁷ Ford, scrapbook materials, Edwin Wilson, “What’s Needed: A Bit More Women’s Lib,” *Wall Street Journal*, date unknown. Wilson writes: “For those who thought there was no way to do a soft shoe number with a new twist, there it is, for he brings in electronic gadgetry to underscore the razzmatazz.”

⁴¹⁸ Nancy Ford, email correspondence to author, October 31, 2018.

⁴¹⁹ Till, “Singer-Songwriter Authenticity,” 291.

⁴²⁰ Till, “Singer-Songwriter Authenticity,” 301.

an authentic and “unmediated” performance that expresses his or her personal experiences through song.⁴²¹ Musicologist Christa Anne Bentley maintains that the term “singer-songwriter” accrues “layers of meanings based in audience perceptions of intimate performance, story-telling, displays of artist vulnerability, and a sense of immediacy between the listener and the artist’s persona.”⁴²²

Author David R. Shumway singles out James Taylor as the first of a “new kind of performer,” and Taylor’s second album, *Sweet Baby James*, brought him recognition as a modern-day troubadour, and 1970s superstar. Shumway declares Taylor’s 1970 release of “Fire and Rain,” with its autobiographical expression of pain and despair, the first song in a confessional mode to become a hit.⁴²³ By the early 1970s, female artists became more prominent in the movement. Shumway points to the early seventies as a time of high visibility for the singer-songwriter, when “James Taylor, [Joni] Mitchell, Carole King, Jackson Browne, Carly Simon, and others created a new niche in the popular music market.” The new style of their songs was confessional, and revealed private struggles.⁴²⁴

The confessional aspect of a song, containing highly introspective or reflective lyrics, arose from a time when consciousness raising encouraged women to voice their concerns. Shumway argues: “Because feminism could not succeed by depicting men and women as inherently opposed camps, its expression needed to offer the possibility of

⁴²¹ Till, “Singer-Songwriter Authenticity,” 296.

⁴²² Bentley, “Los Angeles Troubadours,” 3.

⁴²³ Shumway, “Emergence of Singer-Songwriter,” 15.

⁴²⁴ Shumway, “Emergence of Singer-Songwriter,” 11.

mutual understanding and positive personal transformation for both genders.”⁴²⁵ His observation describes Cryer and Ford’s desire for improved communication between the sexes.

Life as a Singer-Songwriter: A Comparison of Carole King, Cryer, and Ford

Of the various women who found a means of personal expression as singer-songwriters in the 1960s and 1970s, Cryer and Ford’s circumstances most resembles those of Carole King. The three composer/performers have much in common. All three have worked as musical collaborators, individuals writing their own music and lyrics, performers of their own music in nightclubs, recording artists on major record labels, creators of children’s musicals, and actors in leading roles in Broadway or off-Broadway productions.

Their personal lives also reveal parallels. King began composing as a college student in the 1950s, collaborated with a male classmate, Gerry Goffin, married him, and started a songwriting career with him. She also worked as a secretary and wrote songs in the evening.⁴²⁶ Like Cryer, she had two children before divorcing, shouldered the responsibility of caring for them while pursuing a musical career, and experienced the difficulties of balancing work and parenthood.⁴²⁷

Chapter Two discussed the cabaret careers of Cryer and Ford, who worked both together and independently, throughout many decades (see Appendices 3 and 4). Club

⁴²⁵ Shumway, “Emergence of Singer-Songwriter,” 18.

⁴²⁶ King, *A Natural Woman*, 83. King worked as a secretary for a Manhattan company that manufactured industrial chimneys. After work she prepared dinner for her husband and herself, and after dinner, they wrote songs.

⁴²⁷ King understood society’s domestic, traditional expectations of women.

performance and the venues themselves often capture the ethos of the female singer-songwriter who is willing to reveal private thoughts in public places, and a cabaret is the setting for *I'm Getting My Act Together*. All three women have performed regularly in nightclubs, both in Los Angeles (King), in New York (Cryer and Ford), and on the road. King's debut at the Troubadour in Los Angeles is popular music history, and she returned to the venue in 2010, performing and recording *Live at the Troubadour* with old friend, James Taylor.

King, Cryer and Ford all delighted in composing children's musicals, and became musical theater actors. In 1974, King wrote *Really Rosie* in collaboration with children's book author Maurice Sendak, took on the role of Rosie, and narrated its animated television special.⁴²⁸ In 1994, King starred in the Broadway musical, *Blood Brothers*, with book, music, and lyrics by Willy Russell.⁴²⁹ All three women have spent ample time in the recording studio, although Cryer and Ford's discography does not compare with King's long list of recordings.

As discussed above, the score of Cryer and Ford's hit musical, *I'm Getting My Act Together*, contained their most personal lyrics, and arrived when the theater market was open to hearing new female voices. Through a chain of fortunate events that included the musical's conception, discovery, and adoption by the determined Public Theater producer, Joseph Papp, *I'm Getting My Act Together* became the pinnacle of their success. Both *Tapestry* (1971), King's second album which made her a star, and *I'm Getting My Act Together* benefited from a cultural climate in which people were, in

⁴²⁸ King, *A Natural Woman*, 101.

⁴²⁹ King, *A Natural Woman*, 414.

King's words, "beginning to turn inward to explore the emotions about which other songwriters and I were writing." King, Cryer, and Ford understand the effect their music has had on other women. King comments that it was an "uncommon opportunity to create something that touched so many people in a positive way."⁴³⁰

The Cryer and Ford Albums

Cryer and Ford's contributions to the singer-songwriter genre are preserved on two albums recorded in the mid-1970s. Bill Rudman notes that Cryer and Ford were the first musical theater writing team—female *or male*—to double as pop artists who performed their own songs. Rudman places them in the same singing category as Carole King, Joni Mitchell and Carly Simon, particularly in regard to their personal pop albums recorded by RCA. When Rudman asks Ford to describe how their singer-songwriter career began, she explains that after *Shelter* closed, they became somewhat disenchanted with theater composition and began to write individual songs that they viewed as a personal scrapbook of their lives. Tommy Valando, a publisher for the music of Stephen Sondheim, and Kander and Ebb among others, felt they should record and perform their music, and connected them with a manager, Sid Bernstein, famous for bringing the Beatles to America. Cryer recalls, "Sid managed to get us on TV shows like Dinah Shore and Dick Cavett."⁴³¹ The albums led to performances on cabaret stages, and to the creation of *I'm Getting My Act Together*. Some of the album's songs appear in other

⁴³⁰ King, *A Natural Woman*, 224.

⁴³¹ Cryer and Ford, "Song Is You!"

shows, including *Shelter* and a project initiated in 2011, *Still Getting My Act Together* (see Conclusion).

The first album, *Cryer & Ford*, released in 1975, alternates ten ballads and up-tempo pieces.⁴³² Cryer was lyricist and Ford the composer for seven of the songs, but Cryer composed three independently. Their second album, *Cryer and Ford: You Know My Music*, released in 1977, also contained ten songs.⁴³³ Cryer was the sole composer for the title track, “You Know My Music,” and “Sweet Solitude.” Ford performs her only solely composed song on the album, “I Don’t Want To Be Free of You.” In her intimate and touching rendition, she tells the man in her life: “So when you hear me singing songs about being free / You ought to know / They’re not about you and me / I’m singing about the freedom to be who I am / To let you see me.” One of the most unusual numbers is a simple song, “You Can Kill Love,” where the gentle musical setting and whimsical instrumentation run counter to the bleak message. Two of the numbers are character ballads. “Big Bill Murphy” sympathizes with a burned-out man. The song “Last Day At The Job” is about a 62-year-old woman retiring from a bank teller position.⁴³⁴

The positive reception of Cryer and Ford’s songs at a performance for Women’s Equity on May 30, 1979 indicates that audiences appreciated their humanist bent. A

⁴³² See Appendix 11 for titles of tracks and composition credits for both albums. Three of the songs, “Hang On To The Good Times,” “Joy,” and “Randy,” have been interpolated into Cryer and Ford’s most recent musical, *Still Getting My Act Together*. “Randy” is a ballad that contains a narrative about a particular character, and suggests a folk-like quality. “Hang On to the Good Times” became the title for their off-Broadway revue staged in 1985 at the Manhattan Theatre Club (see Chapter Two). *Shelter* is the original source of the closing track, “Changing.” Albert Music published a score containing all ten songs in 1996, and is an endorsement of their work.

⁴³³ Cryer and Ford, interview by author. When asked about the album’s title, Ford calls it a metaphor, and Cryer adds, “You *understand* (my music).”

⁴³⁴ The final song, “Natural High,” became the opening and closing number for *I’m Getting My Act Together*.

follow up article in the organization's magazine lists song titles and descriptions that suggest stories about everyday people: a humorous account of a father's business called "White Trash Motel," a mother's advice to her children called "Hang On to the Good Times," and a lament about a woman who is socialized to be dependent and submissive called "Clinging Vine." One male audience member, quoted in the article, tuned in to Cryer and Ford's message, and commented: "I didn't find the lyrics to be feminist; I found them humanist."⁴³⁵ The albums' songs reflect Cryer and Ford's interest in expressing the concerns of men as well as women.

I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road

Feminism and the Singer-Songwriter Style

I'm Getting My Act Together has been the most discussed show in Cryer and Ford literature, although the music has been overlooked in favor of the discussion on feminism. The show can easily be viewed through a feminist lens that critiques patriarchal ideology, and gender stereotypes in both dialogue and musical numbers. Elizabeth Wollman explains the nature of *I'm Getting My Act Together* in her chapter, "Not-So-Angry Feminist Musicals." Wollman notes that Cryer and Ford's musical presented women's concerns with a light touch that usually avoided alienating audiences.⁴³⁶ She offers a quick survey of the songs and the issues they address, and

⁴³⁵ Ford, scrapbook materials, "Cryer & Ford appeal to packed house with warm, humanist songs," *Women's Equity*, Volume II, Number 7, July 1979; letter to Nancy Ford from Madeline Grillo provides performance date.

⁴³⁶ Wollman, "Not-So-Angry Feminist Musicals," 109.

specifies that the musical steers clear of overt sexuality and maintains focus on women's struggles for equality.⁴³⁷

The following analysis of the musical's critical reception, style, book, and songs provides an understanding of why the show drew admiring audiences nationally and internationally. The singer-songwriter repertoire, which incorporated the intimacy and immediacy of their cabaret act, proved to be the most authentic representation of Cryer and Ford's personal aesthetic.

Production Summary and Critical Reception of *I'm Getting My Act Together*

I'm Getting My Act Together began its off-Broadway run of 1,165 performances on May 16, 1978 at the Public's Anspacher Theater.⁴³⁸ The show started selling out at the end of the first six weeks, and producer Joseph Papp extended it for a second, and then a third six-week run, both of which sold out.⁴³⁹ After 226 performances, Papp moved it to Circle in the Square (Downtown) on December 16, 1978, where it ran until March 15, 1981.⁴⁴⁰ This marked the first time in the history of the New York Shakespeare Festival that a production moved from the Public Theater to an open run at another off-Broadway location.⁴⁴¹ Cryer returned to the show to perform Heather for the last eight weeks, until

⁴³⁷ Wollman, "Not-So-Angry Feminist Musicals," 129.

⁴³⁸ Accessed December 17, 2017, <http://www.lortel.org/Archives/Production/2521>.

⁴³⁹ Cryer, Oral History.

⁴⁴⁰ Dietz, *Off Broadway Musicals*, 214.

⁴⁴¹ Ford, scrapbook materials, Joan Connely, "The Act Is Together and Thriving: Cryer and Ford are a Double Success," *Horizon*, February 1979.

its close on March 15, 1981.⁴⁴² Many national and international cities staged productions of the show in its early years, and as evidence of the show's international acclaim, Cryer mentions a Japanese cast album, and Ford notes two cast albums from Sweden, and one from Copenhagen.⁴⁴³ A plan to produce a movie version of the show never came to fruition.⁴⁴⁴ A new one-act, *Still Getting My Act Together*, which fast-forwards the original story and characters thirty years, was paired with a revival of *I'm Getting My Act Together* at the York Theatre Company in 2011. Encores! Off-Center at the New York City Center produced a limited engagement revival of *I'm Getting My Act Together* in July of 2013 (see Conclusion).

The show opened to primarily negative reviews from male critics. Most were unsympathetic to the character Heather's grievances and did not pick up on the humor underlying the dialogue between Heather and her manager, Joe. Allan Wallach called the piece a "one-act polemic with music" that "takes the form of clichés imbedded in an awkward format," and called Heather an "abrasive role with no real dimension."⁴⁴⁵ One critic complained about the leading male role: "Joe has been so stupidly characterized, so

⁴⁴² Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford, "The York Theatre Company Presents the Summer 2011 Series Musicals in Mufti," interview by Jim Morgan, Producing Artistic Director at the York Theatre Company, Part IV, published on June 23, 2011, accessed January 14, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfeCWpiOorM>.

⁴⁴³ Cryer and Ford, interview by Morgan.

⁴⁴⁴ Aljean Harmetz, Special to the *New York Times*, "Barish Buys Film Rights To Feminist Musical 'Act'," *New York Times*, February 17, 1981, <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/02/17/movies/barish-buys-film-rights-to-feminist-musical-act.html>. The article reported, "Three road companies were touring early this year. One, starring Miss Cryer, was booked into Los Angeles's Huntington Hartford Theater for six weeks and is now in its fourth month, having passed the \$1 million gross this week. Hollywood interest in the play was triggered by its success here, and Francis Coppola's Zoetrope Pictures explored purchasing it for Gene Kelly to produce. However, Zoetrope's financial difficulties are believed to have caused the company to lose interest."

⁴⁴⁵ Ford, scrapbook materials, Allan Wallach, "In Review, Theater: Cryer, Ford Show a polemic with music," *Newsday*, June 15, 1978.

one-sidedly drawn, that he is simply impossible to accept other than as a fall-guy for Cryer's complaints."⁴⁴⁶ As discussed below, Cryer drew from a number of men she had known to create Joe, and certain male critics responded defensively to the bluntness of the character. Cryer, who played Heather, dressed her character to reflect the natural look of the contemporary singer-songwriter, and Kerr criticized her appearance:

She also, quite deliberately, looks terrible. Asked what she's done to her hair, she replies "I just let it go, this is the way it is," and the way it is is kinky-curly and, I would say, messy. Her wardrobe, if a dingy sweater covering a vest and skirt that seemed to have come from an attic last opened in 1914 can be called a wardrobe, improves nothing.⁴⁴⁷

John Simon, who had labeled *Isaac* "Kafkaesque" and found redeeming qualities in *Shelter*, determined the plot of *I'm Getting My Act Together* to be "slight, schematic, and unoriginal." The preceding two shows were so highly innovative, and the new show's feminist premise and pop-standard music were so personal, that Simon's expectations may have been thwarted. He instead focused on Cryer's performance of her own material: "This is clearly an autobiographical outcry, and seldom did a more charming woman cry out more sincerely, more gracefully, more movingly." Cryer was forty-three years old at the time, and Simon writes extensively about her being middle aged. He ends the review: "Miss Cryer is a bundle of solace, a staged lesson in growing older and living on, and I recommend that you memorize her."⁴⁴⁸ The comment is ironic, considering that over forty years later, Cryer is playing an older version of Heather in her and Ford's most recent musical, *Still Getting My Act Together*.

⁴⁴⁶ Ford, scrapbook materials, Kevin Kelly, "Feminist musical lacks punch," *Boston Globe*, week of April 8, 1979.

⁴⁴⁷ Ford, scrapbook materials, Walter Kerr, "Stage View: Two Women, Both Alone, Two Moods," *New York Times*, July 9, 1978.

⁴⁴⁸ Ford, scrapbook materials, John Simon, "Forced Farce, Cryer's Outcry," *New York*, July 3, 1978.

The most perceptive review came three months after the show opened. A pair of reporters from a Manhattan neighborhood newspaper wrote that in spite of the negative notices from major critics, the play had been extended twice, and that “critics apparently expected the work to be a feminist manifesto. . . . But Cryer’s play commands questions and answers that transcend a feminist awareness.” Cryer expressed that her goal for the show was not to be a play that would provide solutions for male-female issues she raised, but a play about “a woman in transition.” The writers quoted Cryer as saying, “I draw characters absurdly, almost in order to draw a polarity. Joe is an exaggeration. . . . Heather is comic because she wants to use her feminist rhetoric in her nightclub act.”⁴⁴⁹

Critic Clive Barnes provided an update on the musical six months after its opening. In it he stated, “A show, in the end, survives or dies on its word of mouth. . . . If memory serves, the notices were not especially enthusiastic.” Barnes had missed the opening and went to see the musical after its transfer to Circle in the Square. He continued:

The show has clearly become a cult musical . . . the show is brash, funny, very agreeable in its brash and funny way, and moreover, it touches a special emotional chord for our times. . . . The show Heather is getting together is about the life she is getting together. . . . The motive force of the show—and the reason for its success—is the vibrancy of Miss Cryer, and her willingness to put herself on the line.⁴⁵⁰

Even though the initial reviews of the show were unfavorable, Cryer and Ford’s fans kept the show running, and eventually critical response in New York and around the world shifted to praise the show for finding an entertaining way to explore the concerns

⁴⁴⁹ Ford, scrapbook materials, Carol Fink and Tom Soter, “Gretchen Cryer’s Act Is All Together,” *Westsider*, August 17, 1978.

⁴⁵⁰ Ford, scrapbook materials, Clive Barnes, “Gretchen takes her ‘Act’ on the road,” *New York Post*, December 27, 1978.

of modern women. The personal nature of the songs is a strong reason for the show's success. The show's dialogue and songs expressed Cryer and Ford's most intimate thoughts and feelings and spoke to their audiences in a relatable way.

Cryer and Ford and the Singer-Songwriter Style

In traditional musical theater, an audience views the characters as highly fictional, and hears the songs as musical expressions of the characters' thoughts, or as a means to forward the action. Cryer and Ford's singer-songwriter material, especially the emotionally laden lyrics in *I'm Getting My Act Together*, elicits the words "authenticity" and "autobiography." The word "authenticity" appears frequently throughout literature on the singer-songwriter era. Bentley calls the word "one of the most problematized terms and concepts in all of popular music studies," yet acknowledges that it is a major characteristic of the singer-songwriter's identity. She explains that because lyrics are presumed to arise from personal experiences, autobiography becomes a hallmark of the style.⁴⁵¹ Wollman observes that Cryer's emotionally raw and "boldly confessional lyrics" model the 1970s introspective singer-songwriter ethos. Cryer, in the role of Heather, projected emotional authenticity as she performed her own, largely autobiographical, lyrics.⁴⁵²

In the 1970s, singer-songwriters such as Carole King and Joni Mitchell brought a female perspective into the pop music arena. The personal and intimate lyrics relate to the feminist movement's practice of consciousness raising meetings that encouraged women

⁴⁵¹ Bentley, "Los Angeles Troubadours," 19.

⁴⁵² Wollman, "Not-So-Angry Feminist Musicals," 123-24.

to voice their concerns. Shumway notes how, in Joni Mitchell's song, "Blue," "the lyrics establish a sense of direct address and autobiographical reference by using more or less conversational language, including specific details of time and place" . . . and "fragments of conversations."⁴⁵³

Sheila Whiteley's assessment of Joni Mitchell and the subjectivity of her album, *Blue*, reveals a striking resemblance to Cryer's songs. Whiteley contrasts Mitchell's early songs about fictional characters with the way *Blue* places Mitchell at the center of her own story, exemplifying "the singer-songwriter who got there by her own efforts."⁴⁵⁴ She further suggests that Mitchell expresses the freedom to make choices, admit mistakes in love affairs, and move forward without regret. Whiteley notes, "Her strength lies in her pragmatism. She was/is a realist who accepts change, a 1970s' woman who chose her loves, accepted pain and bounced back."⁴⁵⁵ The description exemplifies Cryer's character, Heather, and Cryer herself. Cryer calls her and Ford's style "urban folk," and states that it was "all very personal" and required a personal performance style.⁴⁵⁶ The songs in *I'm Getting My Act Together* share King's and Mitchell's narrative of change that described what they and their audiences were experiencing. Sheila Weller calls the transition, "a course of self-discovery, change, and unhappy confrontation with the *limits* of change," which describes Heather's transformation projected through her songs.⁴⁵⁷ The device of a show-within-a-show, as Heather rehearses her numbers with her band, created

⁴⁵³ Shumway, "Emergence of Singer-Songwriter," 16.

⁴⁵⁴ Whiteley, *Women and Popular Music*, 79.

⁴⁵⁵ Whiteley, *Women and Popular Music*, 92.

⁴⁵⁶ Cryer, Oral History.

⁴⁵⁷ Weller, *Girls Like Us*, 26.

a more naturalistic environment that differed from Cryer and Ford's earlier musicals. Cryer's portrayal as Heather, earnestly singing her own lyrical messages, conveyed honest emotions and a sense of urgency to her listeners.

In the singer-songwriter arena, the aesthetic of authenticity allowed performers to "be themselves," delivering music through a simple, lyric-focused singing style and basic acoustic accompaniment. Bentley suggests that the movement's early performers also adopted the fashions and image of the 1960s folk revival and counterculture. She points to Joan Baez as the paradigm, with her plain dress, straight hair, and lack of makeup.⁴⁵⁸ Cryer adopted the idea of being oneself for both Heather's "natural" appearance, and her realistic mode of performance, which made the audience believe that they were watching a real person as opposed to an actor.

Ford suggests that by the time *Shelter* arrived in the late sixties, the rock musical had pretty much taken over. The singer-songwriter style, however, was new, and Ford acknowledges, "*Act* had all the songs that were songs from her [Heather's] act—her cabaret act—so they were cabaret songs. We did bring cabaret songs into the theater."⁴⁵⁹ She recalls that John Kander and Fred Ebb had a Broadway show called *The Act*, a performance showcase for Liza Minnelli who played a former film star attempting a comeback as a Las Vegas showgirl, which was not a huge success.⁴⁶⁰ Cryer adds, "I just

⁴⁵⁸ Bentley, "Los Angeles Troubadours," 29.

⁴⁵⁹ Cryer and Ford, interview by author. In the 1970s, singer-songwriters frequently performed original songs in the casual club environment of the cabaret. Today, cabaret singers perform mostly jazz and musical theater numbers.

⁴⁶⁰ Accessed September 9, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/the-act-4022>. The Broadway show, *The Act*, ran from October 29, 1977-July 1, 1978. The show included a chorus and song and dance numbers in a musical theater rather than a singer-songwriter style.

remember that John Kander said to me ‘Your show is the show that we wish we had written.’”⁴⁶¹

The Book: Setting, Plot Synopsis, and Characters

I’m Getting My Act Together offered a new format with Cryer performing the lead role. She notes that she rallied against the conventional restriction that if a musical theater creator writes characters or dialogue that are too naturalistic, it will not enable a leap into song, and adds: “I’ve always known that I’ve been breaking rules, searching for other forms for the musical. Nobody has recognized that I’m doing that.” Cryer describes the show as “a *play* punctuated by a singer rehearsing the songs in her act.”⁴⁶² The musical’s book provided a realistic element that was reinforced by the extemporaneous feel of the dialogue between Heather and Joe and the casual banter among the other characters. The skits that accompanied the songs aided the dialogue in advancing the story line.

The action in *I’m Getting My Act Together* takes place on a cabaret stage, and props include cabaret tables and chairs, stools, and the musical instruments. The performance begins casually, when the band enters, tunes their instruments, and warms up, in preparation for their rehearsal with Heather.⁴⁶³ Cryer and Ford decided to open the show with a band based on an incident that occurred during rehearsals when Papp was considering dropping the project. They asked Papp to give them three days to make some

⁴⁶¹ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

⁴⁶² Cryer, interview by Betsko and Koenig, 103-4.

⁴⁶³ Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford, *I’m Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road* (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1980). NOTES ON THE PRODUCTION: “The performance begins 3-4 minutes before actual curtain time. The house lights stay up through this. ALICE and CHERYL are doing stretches. Everyone is chatting quietly and jamming. As soon as JAKE is in place, the group launches into the rehearsal of a song.”

changes, and then invited him and approximately one hundred friends to the theater for a fresh viewing. Papp was late, so the band played while they waited for his arrival. After Papp experienced the audience's reaction to the musical, he announced, "We're going ahead." Cryer remarks, "And, ultimately, having the band out there was the way we started the show."⁴⁶⁴

Two main characters, Heather and Joe, and Heather's rock band make up the cast. The book contains direct and substantive conversations between Heather and Joe that reveal their strengths and vulnerabilities, and incidental remarks by the band and backup singers that support the story. Cryer also wrote short scenes for Heather to include as prefaces or interludes. The action is in real time, there are no subplots, and Cryer uses humor to engage the audience."⁴⁶⁵ Even though Cryer and Ford intended to write about their own and their friends' journeys, and not a "feminist musical," feminist elements permeate dialogue and lyrics about being packaged as a sex object, or having an unhappy home life as a child and later as a wife.

The plot concerns Heather, a semi-successful thirty-nine-year-old singer-songwriter in the cabaret circuit, who is planning a comeback tour after several years of acting in soap operas. Heather has composed new material for her act and is presenting it to her long-time manager, Joe, who has just flown in from Los Angeles, and is expecting to hear her old hits, as well as new but similar songs. The plot's dramatic conflict centers on the artistic and personal differences between Heather and Joe. Heather's new act

⁴⁶⁴ Turan and Papp, "I'm Getting My Act Together," 453.

⁴⁶⁵ Cryer, interview by Betsko and Koenig, 97. Cryer states, "*I'm Getting My Act Together* was very funny. After it had gained acceptance, people were able to sit back, relax and laugh. Even the men were able to laugh at themselves."

reflects her growing self-awareness and inner strength, and her desire to reject the roles she assumed in her past. Joe, both as her manager and her former lover, prefers the way she was before.

Heather is both outspoken and vulnerable, but whatever her mood, she is willing to share her feelings through her dialogue and lyrics. Joe has struggles in his relationship with his suicidal wife, and wants to keep Heather's act *status quo*. The old music soothes him and the new music alarms him because he fears the changes he sees in Heather, and worries how they may impact him. Alice and Cheryl are Heather's two backup singers; and Jake, an acoustic guitarist, along with a pianist, electric guitarist, percussionist, and bassist, are dubbed "The Liberated Men's Band," "Plus Two" with Alice and Cheryl. All except Joe appear to form a cohesive group of friends.

Joe and Heather have a long personal and professional history, and she desperately wants his approval for her new act. From the moment Joe enters, he reveals himself as a controlling and patronizing man. The humor resides in the observation that Joe has no idea how weak and obtuse he is, so one is drawn to laugh at his preposterously insensitive remarks. As discussed, many critics deemed him unbelievable, but Cryer suggests otherwise: "That male character was a composite of a number of men I know. And he wasn't *all* that exaggerated. He was a man actually coming out and saying exactly how he felt about the relationship between men and women, verbalizing attitudes that are prevalent."⁴⁶⁶ Joe's dialogue is at times patronizing ("Honey, can you get me a ginger ale?"), blunt ("It offends me and it's gonna offend your audience"), and defensive ("Look, I don't want to be psychoanalyzed here").

⁴⁶⁶ Cryer, interview by Betsko and Koenig, 96-97.

Cryer establishes Joe as the obstacle that Heather must overcome. Joe never sings in the show; he merely responds pejoratively to Heather's numbers, and their feminist themes. He makes discouraging comments, meant to irritate the audience, such as, "There's a lot in there that's going to offend your men in the audience." In a rigorous number that Heather shares with her female singers, he declares, "the image of these three women is not too attractive." When Heather explains the farcical nature of a skit and number, and asks "Didn't you get that?" he responds dryly, "No. I didn't get that." Even Joe's compliments convey cynicism: "That's a nice song. It's not a ball-breaker." In a moment when Joe and Heather reveal their affection for each other and which suggests Heather's lingering romantic feelings in spite of their differences, Heather informs him, "I wrote a song about you. I'm doing it tonight," Joe asks, "Jesus . . . is it offensive?" His only positive response to a new song is his witless observation that their number, which rails against being "put in a package and sold," is "cute. It'll work. . . . It's sexy." Joe's reaction to Heather's assertion of independence is in the manner common to feminist critics at the time: "Women are getting very hostile these days."

By the end of the show, Heather finds the strength to fire Joe, and declare her independence, even though losing Joe represents more than their manager/artist relationship. The song she composes for him, "Old Friend," helps the audience understand that their relationship is an intimate one that she has appreciated and relied on, and that she is saying goodbye to the security it has provided her. This makes her declaration of personal independence even more profound.

In both *Shelter* and *I'm Getting My Act Together*, Maud and Heather tell Michael and Joe respectively that they are in dysfunctional relationships. Joe's wife has a lover,

which makes him feel like a sucker, and he has to deal with her threats of suicide. Heather speaks to him about the destruction of relationships due to lack of honest communication, but Joe's suicidal wife has called, and he insists on rushing back to his West Coast home immediately. His last piece of advice to Heather is to go back to her old act, which he feels works. Heather has her moment of truth, and tells him to "go ahead and split." She realizes that she has gone it on her own before, and she feels empowered to do it again.

Bringing the Singer-Songwriter Aesthetic to the Theater

I'm Getting My Act Together is best categorized as a "backstage musical," and the numbers are completely diegetic with no sung dialogue. McMillin offers *Show Boat*, *Cabaret*, *Follies*, and *Phantom of the Opera* as examples of the subgenre, and notes the ease of justifying numbers in a book that is about the performance of numbers.⁴⁶⁷ All of the musical numbers are songs that Heather has either previously performed or now intends to perform in her act. As opposed to The Zeitgeist in *Isaac*, which provides commentary distanced from the action, the band and backup singers in *I'm Getting My Act Together* are, like Arthur in *Shelter*, involved in the action. Cryer and Ford followed the popular music tradition of the time, with men on the instruments and some vocals, and two women as backup singers.

The amplification for the various musicals changed over the course of the four shows. The first two small-scale shows, *Now Is the Time* and *Isaac*, used no microphones. As a Broadway production, *Shelter* had stage mics along the footlights. *I'm*

⁴⁶⁷ McMillin, *Musical as Drama*, 102-3.

Getting My Act Together used handheld mics with cords, which exemplified the aesthetic of the singer-songwriter style.⁴⁶⁸

Most of the songs are ironic, and reflect on both gender limitation and possibility. It is difficult to separate the plot from the musical numbers because Heather is selecting a sequence of songs to illustrate the personal transformation she is experiencing. Cryer's choice to bring in songs that allude to "the old Heather" allow for the great musical variety for which both musicals and cabaret acts are known. Several of those numbers are love songs and ballads that contain intimate lyrics and delicate melodies, which Cryer uses in two ways: to enable Heather to calm Joe, and to allow Heather to reflect on her past. Cryer also includes a variety of upbeat numbers propelled by energetic rhythms to represent Heather's new, and more liberated self. Heather's updated numbers address feminist attitudes regarding male-female relationships, self-actualization, and self-sufficiency.

Cryer and Ford took advantage of their expertise as singer-songwriters to create a variety of numbers that run the emotional gamut. The songs can be categorized according to whether they represent a memory or problem from the past (typically the ballads) or new realizations and ambitions (typically the up-tempo numbers), and Cryer alternated musical moods with the show, to reveal Heather's "old" and "new" life experiences. No matter what the mood of the song, each reveals the singer-songwriter aesthetic of being personal and authentic, and with Cryer performing the lead, autobiographical.

⁴⁶⁸ Nancy Ford, email correspondence to author, September 29, 2018. Ford notes, "We used to call it (*I'm Getting My Act Together*) the 'mic and stool show' because the actors were having to constantly think about which mic was supposed to go in front of which stool."

Many of the songs confront issues that women of the time had experienced and now rebelled against. In “Smile,” Heather relays the story of how her father told her she wasn’t pretty unless she would smile. The song uses a delicate triple-meter waltz to make a scathing criticism on men’s effort to control women’s behavior and emotional state. A skit intervenes that revisits her childhood, reveals the communication problems of her parents, and fast forwards to her marriage vow to Tommy, and her new role as *his* “smiling girl.” A man telling another boy or man to smile is certainly hard to imagine. “Miss America” speaks ironically about the idealized female image and the masking of genuine female identity. Ford temporarily distances herself from the singer-songwriter style by selecting a stately waltz tempo to project the image of women twirling on a runway as the female trio sings “Miss America / Long ago and far away / Miss America / Where are you today?” which suggests that allowing oneself to be objectified ultimately leads to a lack of self acceptance. A driving rock song, “Put in a Package and Sold,” mirrors the theme expressed in “Miss America,” the prioritization of youth and beauty, and affirms Heather’s resolution to be true to herself and not be molded into a sex object.

Cryer and Ford explore the trials of love in various numbers. Cryer says that the personal and intimate song, “Dear Tom,” is about divorce. Heather apologizes to her ex-husband, narrated through a letter, for never being her real self around him.⁴⁶⁹ In a skit, Jake becomes a lawyer who delivers a ridiculously long and overblown divorce decree, and Heather sings: “Dear Tom / I wish that I had known you / Dear Tom / I wish that you’d known me / Dear Tom / I hope that we learned something / Well, we’ll see.” Cryer

⁴⁶⁹ Cryer and Ford, interview by Stitt. Ford explains the reason behind an apology: “It’s not only women who are raised with certain expectations. The men of our generations were also raised with certain expectations of how we would be; how they would see us and what was demanded of them, too.”

acknowledges that from an early age she had a desire to protect men, including her father, whom she wanted to be happy. She repeated the pattern with her husband, and consequently hid her own voice. She says, “I could always write more truthfully than I could speak out in my life.”⁴⁷⁰

Heather temporarily acquiesces to Joe when she sings an old song, “In A Simple Way I Love You,” to calm his nerves. She delivers it in an intimate singer-songwriter fashion, but then complains that she is tired of it, does not like it any more, and does not want it in her act. When Joe tries to change her mind, Heather responds, “I puke on it!” Heather’s guitarist, Jake, who believes he and Heather would make a good couple, reprises “In A Simple Way I Love You” as a sincere expression of love to her. Jake appears to be a more emotionally in-touch character as a sensitive singer and a member of the Liberated Men’s Band. He sings the love song to Heather, using a simple guitar accompaniment, and she offers him a sincere “thank you,” but shows no indication that she is eager to begin a new relationship. In 1978, the year *I’m Getting My Act Together* opened, Paul Mazursky’s popular film, *An Unmarried Woman*, narrated the turmoil of a newly divorced woman who launches on a journey of self-discovery. A review in *Film Quarterly* faulted the movie for undermining its feminist potential, when “Erica’s decisive, autonomous presence at the center of the film shrivels as soon as she meets Mr. Right.” Mazursky is also criticized for not allowing Erica to grieve the loss of her lengthy marriage, and not having her “become much more than a sex object for either lovers or

⁴⁷⁰ Cryer, interview by Betsko and Koenig, 107-8.

audience.”⁴⁷¹ Heather’s decision to politely deflect Jake’s advances provides a stronger representation of a newly independent woman.

The idea of “domestic bliss” is negated through Cryer’s confessional song, “Lonely Lady,” in which Heather sings of an unhappy childhood due to her parents’ dysfunctional marriage. In the zestful “Natural High,” the lyrics complain of a frenzied lifestyle resulting from an attempt to meet everyone’s demands. The lyrics, “tomorrow I hit the road / Gonna let loose of this heavy load and fly” convey Heather’s love of performance and the freedom it affords her to escape and express herself.

Two upbeat numbers offer contrasting views about being a liberated woman and how this does not preclude the characters’ interest in finding love. In “Strong Woman Number,” Heather and her two female backup singers launch into a skit about three “wonderful, beautiful, talented people” who cannot find love, and segue into the song that concludes, “I’ve gotten my whole life together / Reconstructed it bit by bit / But as for finding love, my friend, / This strong woman number / Doesn’t mean a shit!!” But today is Heather’s birthday. The metaphor for a new life is an upbeat means to resolve the show. The number, “Happy Birthday,” does not reference others or their expectations, but is a celebration of her reclaimed self and life. Cryer and Ford’s music for their feminist musical offers their personally-experienced view of finding and losing love, and finding joy in music through it all.

⁴⁷¹ Todd Gitlin and Carol S. Wolman, “Review: An Unmarried Woman by Paul Mazursky,” in *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 1, accessed November 7, 2018, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1211901>.

Musical Analysis: “Old Friend”

“Old Friend”—History

The ballad, “Old Friend,” is the best-known and most popular number from Cryer and Ford’s repertoire. The song stands out as one of the few in musical theater that celebrates heterosexual friendship over romantic love, along with Cole Porter’s song, “Friendship,” from *Du Barry Was a Lady* (1939). In the popular music genre, Stevie Wonder’s “That’s What Friends Are For” (1962) might be considered a prototype, followed by Simon & Garfunkel, who wrote and recorded “Old Friends” (1968), Carole King, who wrote and recorded “You’ve Got a Friend” (1971), Queen’s “You’re My Best Friend” (1975), and The Rolling Stones’ “Waiting on a Friend” (1981). Composer Georgia Stitt remembers her first encounter with the number: “I’ve never heard a song that captures what friendship is so beautifully.”⁴⁷²

Michael Feinstein, singer, pianist, and keeper of the American Songbook since the 1980s, was one of the first to endorse it with a performance of his own. Feinstein sang “Old Friend” during his engagement in the Oak Room at the Algonquin Hotel in early 1986, and reviewer Stephen Holden noted it as “one of the very few contemporary songs that has been admitted in a very select company.”⁴⁷³ At least ten singers have recorded their versions of “Old Friend,” and others perform it in their acts, thereby adding Cryer

⁴⁷² Cryer and Ford, interview by Stitt. “Old Friend” has its own history. Cryer composed the song for her friend, Brooks Jones, for his fortieth birthday. She recalls that the line, “we’ll meet the year we’re sixty-two and travel the world as old friends do,” became a reality for them: “We were forty when we wrote that, and when we reached sixty-two, I got in the mail a ticket to East Africa, Kenya, to go on a safari with Brooks to travel the world as old friends do.”

⁴⁷³ Stephen Holden, “Critics’ Choices: Pop/In the Clubs,” *New York Times*, March 16, 1986, <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/03/16/arts/critics-choices-pop-in-the-clubs.html>.

and Ford's song to a repertoire of standards, alongside songs by luminaries like the Gershwins, Rodgers and Hart, and Lerner and Loewe.

Producer Craig Zadan, who introduced Cryer and Ford's idea for *I'm Getting My Act Together* to Joseph Papp, heard them sing "Old Friend" at a public event and suggested they add it to the show. This is an unusual instance of a song driving the plot and characters as opposed to Ford's typical practice of creating a song derived from the character. Ford says that the addition of the song led to the idea of a much more personal, and not just professional, relationship between Heather and Joe. She calls the inclusion "an important adjustment, in addition to giving the song a home and far more exposure than it would have had as one of our individual songs."⁴⁷⁴

The song implies a heterosexual friendship, and the friend that Heather is singing about is Joe. Heather informs Joe that she has written a sympathetic song about him, for "the cream puff." The lyrics both envision the type of man she wishes Joe and other men to be, and redeems him as a caring friend who has always been there for her, at least until now.

"Old Friend"—The Lyrics

I'm Getting My Act Together chronicles many of the experiences Cryer, Ford, and their friends confronted as women, and Cryer viewed it as a long journey to self-discovery. In a 1979 article in *Horizon* magazine, Cryer explained the emotional context in her lyrics for "Old Friend": "The show is an odyssey. It's about the kinds of changes women go through from the point of being defined by others in a male-oriented culture

⁴⁷⁴ Nancy Ford, email correspondence to author, August 23, 2018.

. . . ‘Old Friend’ [shows that] men and women can maintain strong bonds despite their difficulty in having a significant relationship.”⁴⁷⁵

“Old Friend” encompasses the intimate and autobiographical aesthetic of the singer-songwriter genre. The majority of Cryer’s lyrics in *I’m Getting My Act Together* are in a first person voice, and “Old Friend” expresses more familiarity by narrating a conversation word by word (“And I say, ‘Let’s get together’”). Cryer’s lyrics in the refrain envision a comfortable scenario for a “get together” in a familiar bar, and set up the song’s conclusion, when the “bartender is dozing.” The words project the future of a long-term friendship, with the pair traveling the world together “as old friends do.” The opening section of Billy Joel’s familiar piano ballad from 1977, “Scenes from an Italian Restaurant,” similarly envisions two old friends sharing a night out and conversing over a drink. Similar to “Old Friend,” Joel’s 1972 song, “Piano Man,” recalls and quotes conversation verbatim. Both of Joel’s songs illustrate the “slice of life”/friendship trend of popular music at the time.

The lyrics convey, in three verses and a repeating chorus, many of the qualities one would desire in a close friend: a reliable interpersonal bond (“Every time I’ve lost another lover / I call up my old friend”), open communication (“And he listens as I tell him my sad story”), empathy and support (“And we ponder why I do it / And the pain of getting through it”), honesty and humor (“And he laughs and says, ‘You’ll do it again’”), camaraderie (“And we sit in a bar and talk ’til two / About life and love as old friends do”), candor (“And I ask him if his life is ever lonely / And if he ever feels despair”), gumption and personal growth (“And he says he’s learned to love it”), acceptance and

⁴⁷⁵ Ford, scrapbook materials, Joan Connely, “The Act Is Together and Thriving: Cryer and Ford are a double success,” *Horizon*, February 1979.

maturity (“‘Cause that’s really all part of it / And it helps him feel the good times when they’re there”), mutual understanding (“And we figure that I’ll go it on my own”), and longevity (“But we’ll meet the year we’re sixty-two / And travel the world as old friends do”). The song concludes, without direct statement, that a great friendship endures after other relationships falter. In Heather’s case, there is an element of uncertainty about whether the promise of lasting friendship will be, or should be, kept.

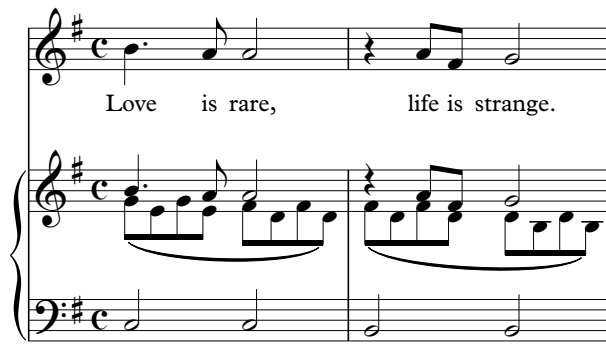
“Old Friend”—The Music

Ford combines various musical elements to create a simple and poignant setting of the song that makes the lyrics feel familiar and intimate. The music and lyrics elicit a personal response from the listener based on her or his own similar experiences. The song’s adoption as a standard for the cabaret environment may stem from the fact that it was initially presented in this setting, and heard by other singers who create in that setting as well.

In the context of the musical, Heather performs the song for Joe, telling him she will be singing it in her act that night.⁴⁷⁶ Ford uses a repeated “sigh” motive of falling seconds for the opening refrain of “love is rare, life is strange” (Example 1). The phrase, which recurs throughout the number and closes the song, gently envelops the story told in the verses, and emphasizes the importance of the lyrics by placing them above the normal melodic tessitura of the song (Examples 2 and 3).

⁴⁷⁶ The show version of the song is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dbowz25MrZY>.

Example 1:



The melodic setting for the song is diatonic, except for a passing tone of F^{\sharp} on the words “love” and “old” in the refrain’s phrase, “And we sit in a bar and talk ’til two / about life and love as old friends do.” The chromatic descent on that phrase adds a slightly melancholic quality to the otherwise simple melody. The musical contour of Heather’s verse is a stepwise flow of notes in a limited range, occasionally interrupted by an upward leap of a fifth or a downward leap of a fourth, especially on key words, such as “lov-er” (Example 2).

Example 2:



The naturalistic setting of the words replicates natural speech patterns; for example, through the use of sixteen notes on connecting words like “and” and half notes on affective ones like “despair” (Example 3).

Example 3:



As shown in the examples above, the texture of the accompaniment is very simple, and serves as a canvas for the more important melody. Example 3 also shows how Ford echoes and lifts a vocal phrase (“feels despair”) with a pattern of rising sixths, adding a feeling of shared intimacy through the musical response.

Ford has composed an alternate setting for the song that she acknowledges is her preferred version.⁴⁷⁷ The three examples that follow show some of the ways Ford updated the piece with a more contemporary sound.

From the song’s first notes in the opening refrain, both the rhythm of the melody and the accompaniment reveal changes. The refrain is introduced by a new three-note piano lead in, which becomes a motive in both voices of the accompaniment, replacing

⁴⁷⁷ Special thanks to Nancy Ford, who provided me with a copy of her personal setting of “Old Friend.” Having her score for my analysis allowed me to gain further insight into her artistic and musical choices. The score is now available for purchase at <https://www.musicnotes.com>. Cryer and Ford’s performance of the song in 2014 closely resembles this version, and is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJIP7J9nwSU>.

the original half note bass line. Each measure of the sung melody now begins after the first beat, which energizes the vocal expression (Example 4).

Example 4:

Example 4 is a musical score in 2/4 time, featuring a vocal melody and piano accompaniment. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The vocal line consists of two measures: the first measure contains the lyrics "Love is rare," and the second measure contains "Life is strange". The melody begins on the second beat of each measure. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves. The right hand plays a melody that begins on the first beat of each measure, with a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure. The left hand plays a bass line with chords and single notes, also featuring a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure.

Ford also uses syncopation to call attention to certain words by placing the first syllable on an upbeat, which conveys a spicier feeling, as shown in the word “lov-er” (Example 5).

Example 5:

Example 5 is a musical score in 2/4 time, focusing on the phrase "lov-er". The key signature has one sharp (F#). The vocal line consists of two measures: the first measure contains the lyrics "lov-er" and the second measure is empty. The melody begins on the second beat of each measure. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves. The right hand plays a melody that begins on the first beat of each measure, with a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure. The left hand plays a bass line with chords and single notes, also featuring a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure.

Ford’s revised text setting is even more finely attuned to natural speech patterns, and provides an even stronger feeling of familiarity for the listener. This can be observed in her shift from even eighth notes in the original version to the use of sixteenth notes on “ever” and “despair.” A comparison of the two accompaniments shows that Ford now

removes the unison to the melody from the right hand, replaces it with a dotted rhythm, and moves the running eighth note pattern to the bass line. The change that most affects the mood for the listener is the melancholic effect of the descending right hand pattern in the second measure, which replaces the uplifting echo effect used in the first version (Example 6).

Example 6:



Ford includes an upward modulation from G major to A \flat major in her revised version, a convention in show tunes that she often uses, notably in “All Alone” in *Now Is The Time*, and “Around the Bend” in *Anne of Green Gables*, and which she adds for excitement in the climax of the piece.⁴⁷⁸ The key change occurs just prior to Heather singing that she and her friend decide she will remain single, but that they will meet at the age of sixty-two to travel the world together. The modulation creates an optimistic feeling about Heather’s imagined future. Although related to the text and not the music, the lyric is now rewritten to use “we” instead of “I,” further emphasizing the unity of the friendship. Throughout the revised version, Ford varies the textures of the accompaniment for each verse and refrain, which takes the listener through a broader

⁴⁷⁸ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

emotional experience than the one provided in the original score, which features the more simplistic setting of the singer-songwriter style.

Cryer and Ford's musicals prove their commitment to relatable and timely female characters, and they reiterate the overarching theme of discovering oneself and articulating a personal vision. In *Now Is the Time*, Mike Butler philosophizes about taking an individual course in life, and Sarah begins to break free from old behavioral patterns and small-town expectations. In *Isaac*, the title character appears to be the teacher, but Ingrid becomes the better student when she determines to try to change her way of life. In *Shelter*, Michael is a delusional man who remains in his fabricated environment after all three women who enter his "shelter" leave him to focus on their own lives. In *I'm Getting My Act Together*, Heather has already realized the limitations of her past, and has created a whole new "act" that describes the woman she is ready to be. In just over a decade, Cryer and Ford traversed a wide divide on their path to female expression.

The musicals' contextual themes express deep concerns regarding an individual's freedom to truthfully express herself or himself, and the importance of being able to communicate that truth. *Now Is the Time* examines freedom of expression without the fear of being deemed unpatriotic, a coward, or a deserter. *Isaac* shows the danger of allowing media extensions to represent oneself, rather than direct one-on-one communication. *Shelter* offers a metaphor, which today has become an every day reality, about using artificial intelligence to create a world detached from other human beings. *I'm Getting My Act Together* conveys the struggles of a woman who decides to verbalize and vocalize the issues she has experienced as a female, and attempt to rise above them.

In the process of conveying these messages, Cryer and Ford shift from a traditional musical setting incorporating a book musical with a standard roster of characters and a chorus, to experimental styles that include Absurdism. The transition from primarily nondiegetic music in *Now Is the Time* to all diegetic numbers in *I'm Getting My Act Together* demonstrates a changing musical language that included eclecticism in early shows, and culminated in the singer-songwriter style that resulted in their most discernable emotional expression.

CONCLUSION: “IF I COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE”

MODELS OF FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

In the year 2000, Cryer and Ford turned sixty-five, an age when many Americans retire. At the time of this writing, however, they are as engaged and busy as most young professionals. My June 2018 interview with the collaborators revealed that they maintain an active presence in the industry. Projects in this year included readings for *Eleanor* in January and February, a career retrospective sponsored by the Ohio Arts Council in March, a summer production of *Anne of Green Gables* in Vermont, and a November showing of their 2011 musical, *Still Getting My Act Together*, in New York.

This study has sought to inform readers of the most significant activities of a pair of female collaborators, unknown to mainstream music audiences, who secured livelihoods for themselves in the male-dominated world of musical theater composition. From their earliest New York musical, *Now Is the Time for All Good Men*, through the present, Cryer and Ford have combined their writing and compositional skills with their instincts and imagination. Their New York musicals reflected their sensitivity to contemporary and cutting-edge trends in literature, theater, and technology, and foretold the significance of the challenges of technology of modern times. Their introduction of the singer-songwriter genre to the off-Broadway stage gave them a platform to voice feminist thoughts that would not have been well received on Broadway. Their reputation for creating the first feminist musical is buoyed by the works they have created for girls (the American Girl revues and *Anne of Green Gables*), young to middle-aged women (the New York musicals and *Eleanor*), and older women (*Still Getting My Act Together*). A

short survey of their activities in the twenty-first century below shows that their reputation for supporting the female voice persists in their characters and themes.

Elevating the Female Voice

The millennium has seen a rapid increase in the number of female bookwriters, lyricists, and composers, and women's voices are growing more diverse stylistically and thematically. Contemporary musicals composed by women often focus on women and sisterhood, support female activism, and offer messages of inclusion.

Women continue to make headway in the receptive off-Broadway community. In May of 2018, *Broadway World*, a theatrical website, evidenced the fresh growth of female representation when they announced the winners of the 2018 Drama League Awards. Out of the nine nominees for Outstanding Production of a Broadway or Off-Broadway Musical, eight shows feature a book, lyrics and/or music by a female composer. Conversely, the category Outstanding Revival of a Broadway or Off-Broadway Musical was dominated by revivals by men, but for Lynn Ahrens, who wrote *Once on This Island* with composer, Stephen Flaherty.⁴⁷⁹

Cryer and Ford continue to write many types of theater and music focused on female issues. They have tackled social issues from the start of their career, and Cryer states, "I write about what is important to me, and yes, it's usually connected to contemporary issues."⁴⁸⁰ At a career retrospective in March of 2018, Cryer described the

⁴⁷⁹ BWW News Desk, "Breaking: Glenda Jackson, CURSED CHILD, THE BAND'S VISIT & More Win at the 2018 Drama League Awards!" May 18, 2018, accessed August 10, 2018, https://www.broadwayworld.com/article/Breaking-Who-Will-Win-at-the-2018-Drama-League-Awards-Updating-Live-20180518#.W25_q4jTnLg.email.

⁴⁸⁰ Rudman, "Old Friends."

urgency she feels in securing a production for *Eleanor* given the current political climate. Cryer states, “Resistance is in the air, and Eleanor had her own underground resistance right in the White House.”⁴⁸¹ Talk of *Eleanor* first surfaced in 1978, and forty years later, Cryer explains that her and Ford’s collaboration has been underwritten by efforts to get *Eleanor* professionally produced.⁴⁸² In 2018, they presented readings and hope that Eleanor’s voice will again be heard.

Cryer and Ford found a new opportunity to elevate the voice of the young female following the American Girl revues. In 2007, they wrote and composed the TheaterWorksUSA family musical, *Anne of Green Gables*.⁴⁸³ Ford recalls that when she and Cryer read Lucy Maud Montgomery’s novel, “we were both immediately taken with it and that character who is kind of a young feminist.”⁴⁸⁴ Ford says of Anne: “She has an indomitable spirit; she’s imaginative and tempestuous, spunky and optimistic, and has an amazing sense of self despite all the hardships she has endured before arriving at Green Gables. All of these emotions—which she freely puts on display!—were just the inspiration I needed to write her music.”⁴⁸⁵

The cabaret stage remains a platform for Cryer and Ford’s voice in support of women. Their events might include a one-time only song, or numbers from one of their shows, and sometimes support charitable causes. They performed their own music as a

⁴⁸¹ Cryer and Ford, “Song Is You!”

⁴⁸² Cryer and Ford, interview by Stitt.

⁴⁸³ Accessed January 16, 2018, <http://www.theatreworksusa.org/history.cfm>. (site discontinued). The organization is now called TheaterWorksUSA, and the new website, accessed August 17, 2018, is <https://twusa.org>. The musical ran off Broadway from March 29 though May 5, 2007, and embarked on a national tour that fall.

⁴⁸⁴ Cryer and Ford, interview by Stitt.

⁴⁸⁵ Cryer and Ford, “Song Is You!”

duo or in programs with other women who sang popular music or musical theater pieces, and composed songs for other women to sing. Cryer and Ford join others to perform music both for and by older women, to make certain their voices are heard. In 2002, they performed in “Timeless Divas!” at the Triad Theater in Manhattan. A *Playbill* article noted that a portion of the proceeds would benefit the Phyllis Newman Women’s Health Initiative of the Actors Fund of America.⁴⁸⁶ The Red Hat Society, an organization of women over fifty from all walks of life, developed a 2006 revue-like musical piece called *Hats!* and Cryer contributed lyrics to Stephen Lawrence’s music for the song, “Celebration,” for the production.⁴⁸⁷ In 2007, Cryer and Ford brought “Getting Their Act Together Again!” to the cabaret stage. In his *New York Times* review, Stephen Holden acknowledged their long-term partnership and related it to their signature song, “Old Friend,” adding: “To hear it sung by its creators, who are performing an anthology of their theater music . . . is to be stirred by a pop avowal of friendship through thick and thin that has no expiration date.” In 2013, they headlined a revue at Feinstein’s/54 Below, *Gretchen Cryer & Nancy Ford Present: Binders Full of Women’s Songs*.⁴⁸⁸ The performance by women in cabaret venues continues to be an important avenue for female personal expression.

⁴⁸⁶ Andrew Gans, “Timeless Divas! Series Kicks Off Dec. 8 With Feldshuh, MacRae & More,” November 19, 2002, accessed November 16, 2017, <http://www.playbill.com/article/timeless-divas-series-kicks-off-dec-8-with-feldshuh-mac-rae-more-com-109661>.

⁴⁸⁷ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

⁴⁸⁸ Accessed December 28, 2017, <https://www.ticketweb.com/event/gretchen-cryer-nancy-ford-present-binders-full-of-womens-songs-a-celebration-of-women-musical-theatre-54-below-tickets/3645664?>.

Still Getting Their Act Together: A Sequel, a Revival, and a Hybrid

Cryer and Ford's works have been revived and recycled, proving that audiences remain receptive to their music and ideas. Their acclaimed 1978 musical, *I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road*, is an industry landmark in feminist musical theater. In June of 2011, they debuted a new one-act musical, *Still Getting My Act Together*, at the York Theatre Company, which they paired with a revival of the original.⁴⁸⁹ *Still Getting My Act Together*, which primarily contains new songs along with three from their album, *Cryer & Ford*, brings the 1978 characters into the twenty-first century, and brought Cryer back to the stage as the now sixty-nine year old Heather. Ford explains, "*I'm Getting My Act Together* was about sexism and *Still Getting My Act Together* is about ageism."⁴⁹⁰ A return to and update of their 1978 hit reflects their own journey, their influence as pioneers for women in the profession, and their effect on musical theater creativity and performance.

Bill Rudman asks Cryer what a forty-year-old musical that reflects its time in the late Seventies still has to say today. Cryer admits that she and Ford were surprised when women in their twenties, thirties, and forties said they related to it. She realizes, though, that the sexual politics are still relevant, stating, "Now just this year women have started to have the courage to speak up about abuse and inequities of all kinds—things that were kept under wraps before." Ford acknowledges that while most women do not want to lose the men in their lives, the character of Heather in *I'm Getting My Act Together* fired her

⁴⁸⁹ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

⁴⁹⁰ Cryer and Ford, "Performance and Storytelling Session."

manager to declare her authentic self and take control of her life.⁴⁹¹ In the current political climate, the feminist statement at the show's end resonates strongly with women of all ages.

In July of 2013, Encores! Off-Center at the New York City Center revived *I'm Getting My Act Together*. Now that the musical had garnered a position in theater history, the criticism was much more favorable than the original 1978 reviews, and the song, "Old Friend," was a favorite. In October of 2015, Cryer and Ford took the musical and *Still Getting My Act Together* to Laguna Playhouse in Laguna Beach, California. In a *Los Angeles Magazine* interview with Cryer, Craig Byrd describes how the original show and the sequel were "trimmed and combined" for those particular performances. Cryer explains, "Act one is a period piece, and you acknowledge that it's a period piece. But the emotional reality is still very much there."⁴⁹² Cryer and Ford hope to see *Still Getting My Act Together* produced as the stand-alone musical they intended. They agree that "It Ain't Over 'Til It's Over," composed for the show, best conveys the message that there is no truth in the preconception that older women are without value and worth.⁴⁹³

Awards and Achievements

Cryer and Ford's work, individually and collectively, has earned them respect and honors in various situations. *I'm Getting My Act Together* is the musical typically

⁴⁹¹ Cryer and Ford, "Song Is You!"

⁴⁹² Gretchen Cryer, interview, Craig Byrd, "Curtain Call: 35 Years Later, Gretchen Cryer Creates a Sequel to *I'm Getting My Act Together* and *Taking It on the Road*," *Los Angeles Magazine*, October 14, 2015, accessed November 2, 2018, <https://www.lamag.com/culturefiles/curtain-call-35-years-later-gretchen-cryer-creates-a-sequel-to-im-getting-my-act-together-and-taking-it-on-the-road/>.

⁴⁹³ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

associated with Cryer and Ford, but it was *The Last Sweet Days of Isaac* that brought critical acclaim and many awards including the Obie (off-Broadway theater), the Drama Desk (most promising musical writers, not specific to Broadway or off Broadway), and the Outer Critics' Circle (achievements both on and off Broadway) Awards. *I'm Getting My Act Together* earned the duo a Grammy nomination, and won, for Cryer, the Ed Kleban Prize in Musical Theatre and a Joseph Jefferson Award as actress in a principal role in a musical, as well as one for the production. Ford won two Emmys and two Writers Guild Awards for her scriptwriting talents for *Ryan's Hope*. Cryer and Ford received the 2004-2005 Lee Reynolds Award from the League of Professional Theatre Women for Creative Collaborations to American Theater.⁴⁹⁴ Both received honorary degrees of Doctor of Arts from Eastern Michigan University in 1986; Ford received an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts from DePauw University in 2002; and Cryer received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Colorado College in 2006.⁴⁹⁵

The election of President Trump sounded an alarm that resulted in a new era of female activism that includes the annual Women's March, and the #MeToo and Time's Up movements against sexual harassment and aggression. Theater women are among those who are demonstrating a renewed awareness of injustices that exist in our country. Jennifer M. DiBella, director of education at New York's Roundabout Theatre Company, asserts:

I believe that theatre has the power to activate a community of empathetic, creative, and critically-responsive citizens who are connected deeply to the world around them. However, this can only happen if we face the very real sexism, racism, classism, ableism, etc. that exists in our industry. I have

⁴⁹⁴ Nancy Ford, email correspondence to author, September 12, 2018.

⁴⁹⁵ Cryer and Ford, interview by author.

been fortunate to have worked with and learned from many strong female leaders who have encouraged me to take risks and stand up for what I believe in. However, we know that we have a long way to go.⁴⁹⁶

For decades, Cryer and Ford brought marginalized individuals' voices to the stage. In the twenty-first century, they deliver works such as the American Girl revues that emphasize diversity over homogeneity, and *Still Getting My Act Together*, which acknowledges older women and men as a vibrant group of citizens.

Cryer and Ford have assumed many roles and taken on many challenges since their early days at DePauw University. As both collaborators and solo practitioners, they have composed, written, sung, played instruments, acted, directed, produced, and taught. They were prescient in their treatment of human relationships and technology. Their messages are often transparently based on personal experiences and feelings, yet treated with humor and satire in a way that shows their mastery of communication. As a team, they changed with the times, both topically and musically. They interwove their careers in cabaret style (and perennial returns to it through reprises and/or new material), with other interests (children's musicals, song performance and recording) and activities (directing and writing television drama). As innovative artists, the characteristics of tenacity and flexibility have propelled them forward, and they stand as role models for others to live empowered lives.

⁴⁹⁶ Jennifer M. DiBella, "Women to Watch 2017: Women Behind the Scenes," *The Interval*, <http://www.theintervalny.com/features/2017/10/women-to-watch-2017-women-behind-the-scenes/>, October 4, 2017.

APPENDIX 1

FEMALE BOOKWRITERS, LYRICISTS, AND COMPOSERS OF BROADWAY AND OFF-BROADWAY PRODUCTIONS 1907-2018

The 111-year span of this list divides by decades. Each composer's name appears in chronological order determined by the premiere of her first composed show. The work of some composers and lyricists spans several decades. In any given year with multiple entries, names appear alphabetically. The date and title of each musical appear after each name. The genre designation of each work (musical, musical comedy, revue, revival, or similar designation) follows the title. The woman's creative role (bookwriter, lyricist, composer, or a combination of those) follows the musical genre. All shows listed are either Broadway or off-Broadway productions. Off-Broadway musicals are bold-faced to distinguish them from Broadway musicals.

The productions included here are complete musicals that present a story. The musical creators may have written other works not included here, such as plays with incidental music; special or concert events; or featured songs, additional music and/or lyrics, or dance music in musicals. The list does not include women's roles as music directors or music supervisors, orchestrators, conductors, performers, or instrumentalists. If a male bookwriter, lyricist, or composer is a collaborator, he is not listed.

All Broadway productions are searchable in the Internet Broadway Database (<https://www.ibdb.com/>).⁴⁹⁷ All off-Broadway productions are listed in the Lortel Archives (<http://www.lortel.org/Archives>).⁴⁹⁸ Theaters and locations, production dates, show credits, song titles, and award information are available under each musical's online listing. The theater designations of Broadway and off Broadway reflect geography and seating capacity. Broadway is a district on the west side of midtown Manhattan, and off-Broadway theaters must be located in Manhattan. Broadway theaters contain 500 or more seats, and off-Broadway theaters contain 100-499 seats.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁷ Accessed September 14, 2018, <https://www.ibdb.com/about>. The Internet Broadway Database website was developed by the research department of The Broadway League, the national trade association for Broadway. The goal is to offer a website to "serve as a comprehensive history of Broadway for the benefit of League members, press, theatre professionals and enthusiasts." They derive their information primarily from theater programs, and take supplemental information from newspaper and magazine reports, theatrical textbooks, theater professionals' interviews, and Broadway League archives.

⁴⁹⁸ Accessed November 2, 2018, <http://www.lortel.org/Archives/About>. The Lortel Archives, also known as the Internet Off-Broadway Database (www.IOBDB.com), provide a catalogue of shows produced off Broadway. As of 11/2/2018, the Lortel Archives contain listings for 6,553 productions.

⁴⁹⁹ Ruthie Fierberg, "What Is the Difference Between Broadway, Off-Broadway, and Off-Off-Broadway?" November 11, 2017, accessed August 10, 2018, <http://www.playbill.com/article/what-is-the-difference-between-broadway-off-broadway-and-off-off-broadway>.

1900s

Anne Caldwell

- 1907—*The Top o' th' World*, Musical, Extravaganza, Composer
- 1912—*The Lady of the Slipper*, Musical, Fantasy, Bookwriter
- 1914—*Chin Chin*, Musical, Fantasy, Bookwriter, Lyricist
- 1916—*Pom-Pom*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist
- 1916—*Go For It*, Musical, Lyricist
- 1917—*Jack O'Lantern*, Musical, Extravaganza, Bookwriter, Lyricist
- 1919—*She's A Good Fellow*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist
- 1919—*The Lady in Red*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist
- 1920—*The Night Boat*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist
- 1920—*The Sweetheart Shop*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist
- 1920—*Tip Top*, Musical, Extravaganza, Bookwriter, Lyricist
- 1920—*Hitchy-Koo [1920]*, Musical, Revue, Lyricist
- 1921—*Good Morning Dearie*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist
- 1922—*The Bunch and Judy*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist
- 1923—*Stepping Stones*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist
- 1924—*Peg-O'-My-Dreams*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist
- 1924—*The Magnolia Lady*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist
- 1925—*The City Chap*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist
- 1926—*Criss Cross*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist
- 1927—*Yours Truly*, Musical, Lyricist
- 1927—*Take the Air*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist
- 1928—*Three Cheers*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist

1920s

Dorothy Fields

- 1928—*Blackbirds of 1928*, Musical, Revue, Lyricist
- 1928—*Hello, Daddy*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist
- 1929—*Ziegfeld Midnight Frolic*, Musical, Revue, Lyricist
- 1930—*The International Review*, Musical, Revue, Lyricist, Composer
- 1930—*The Vanderbilt Revue*, Musical, Revue, Lyricist, Composer
- 1931—*Shoot the Works*, Musical, Revue, Lyricist
- 1939—*Stars In Your Eyes*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist
- 1941—*Let's Face It!* Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter
- 1941—*Something for the Boys*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter
- 1944—*Mexican Hayride*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter
- 1945—*Up In Central Park*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist
- 1946—*Annie Get Your Gun*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter
- 1950—*Arms and the Girl*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist
- 1951—*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, Musical, Lyricist
- 1954—*By The Beautiful Sea*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist

1959—*Redhead*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist
1966—*Sweet Charity*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist
1973—*Seesaw*, Musical, Romantic Comedy, Lyricist
1979—*Sugar Babies*, Musical, Revue, Lyricist

Irma Hopper

1928—*Say When*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist, Composer

Daisy deSegonsak

1928—*Say When*, Musical, Comedy, Composer

Kay Swift

1928—*Say When*, Musical, Comedy, Composer

1930—*Fine and Dandy*, Musical, Comedy, Composer

1930s

Ann Ronell

1931—*Shoot the Works*, Musical, Revue, Composer

1942—*Count Me In*, Musical, Revue, Comedy, Lyricist, Composer

Theresa Helburn

1937—*A Hero Is Born*, Musical, Extravaganza, Bookwriter

Agnes Morgan

1937—*A Hero is Born*, Musical, Extravaganza, Lyricist

1940s

Betty Comden

1944—*On the Town*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist

1945—*Billion Dollar Baby*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist

1951—*Two on the Aisle*, Musical, Revue, Sketchwriter, Lyricist

1953—*Wonderful Town*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist

1956—*Bells Are Ringing*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist

1958—*A Party with Betty Comden & Adolph Green*, Musical, Revue, Bookwriter,
Lyricist

1960—*Do Re Mi*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist

1961—*Subways Are for Sleeping*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist

1964—*Fade Out—Fade In*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist

1967—*Hallelujah, Baby!* Musical, Lyricist

1970—*Applause*, Musical, Bookwriter

1974—*Lorelei*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist

1978—*On the Twentieth Century*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist

1982—*A Doll's Life*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

1991—*The Will Rogers Follies*, Musical, Lyricist

1950s

Anna Russell

1953—*Anna Russell's Little Show*, Musical, Revue, Lyricist, Composer

Carolyn Leigh

1954—*Peter Pan*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist

1957—*Ziegfeld Follies of 1957*, Musical, Revue, Lyricist, Composer

1960—*Wildcat*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist

1962—*Little Me*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist

1967—*How Now, Dow Jones*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist

Portia Nelson

1955—*Almost Crazy*, Musical, Revue, Lyricist, Composer

Mary Rodgers Guettel

1959—*Once Upon a Mattress*, Musical, Comedy, Composer

1963—*Hot Spot*, Musical, Composer

1966—*The Mad Show*, Musical, Revue, Composer

1972—*Davy Jones' Locker*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer

1960s

Marguerite Monnot

1960—*Irma La Douce*, Musical, Comedy, Composer

Naomi Caryl Hirshhorn

1963—*Spoon River Anthology*, Musical, Composer

Marian Grudeff

1965—*Baker Street: A Musical Adventure of Sherlock Holmes*, Musical, Lyricist,
Composer

Gretchen Cryer

1967—*Now Is the Time for All Good Men*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

1970—*The Last Sweet Days of Isaac*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

1973—*Shelter*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

**1978—*I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road*, Musical,
Bookwriter, Lyricist**

1986—*Hang On to the Good Times*, Revue, Lyricist

2007—*Anne of Green Gables*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

Nancy Ford

1967—*Now Is the Time for All Good Men*, Musical, Composer

1970—*The Last Sweet Days of Isaac*, Musical, Composer

1973—*Shelter*, Musical, Composer

1978—*I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road*, Musical, Composer

1986—*Hang On to the Good Times*, Revue, Composer

2007—*Anne of Green Gables*, Musical, Composer

1970s

Susan Hulsman Bingham

1970—*Mod Donna*, Musical, Composer

Myrna Lamb

1970—*Mod Donna*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

Phyllis Robinson

1970—*Cry for Us All*, Musical, Lyricist

1995—*Angel Levine*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer

Carole Bayer Sager

1970—*Georgy*, Musical, Lyricist

1979—*They're Playing Our Song*, Musical, Romantic Comedy, Lyricist

Eve Merriam

1971—*Inner City*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

1976—*The Club*, Musical, Bookwriter

Helen Miller

1971—*Inner City*, Musical, Composer

Addy O. Fieger

1972—*Dear Oscar*, Musical, Composer

Micki Grant

1972—*Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope*, Musical, Revue, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer

1976—*Your Arms Too Short to Box With God*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer

1980—*It's So Nice To Be Civilized*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer

Caryl Gabrielle Young

1972—*Dear Oscar*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

Jill Williams

1974—*Rainbow Jones*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer

Elizabeth Swados

- 1977—*Night Cantata*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer**
1978—*Runaways*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer
1978—*Runaways*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer
1979—*Dispatches*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer
1980—*Alice in Concert*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer
1982—*Lullabye and Goodnight*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer
1983—*Doonesbury*, Musical, Comedy, Composer
1984—*Rap Master Ronnie*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer
1989—*Don Juan of Seville*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer
1989—*The Red Sneaks*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer
1992—*Groundhog*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer
2014—*A Fable*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer

Dianne Adams

- 1978—*One & One*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer**
1998—*The Wind in the Willows*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer

Carol Hall

- 1978—*The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist, Composer**
1978—*The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist, Composer
1994—*The Best Little Whorehouse Goes Public*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer
2007—*Max and Ruby*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer

1980s

Carole King

- 1980—*Really Rosie*, Musical, Composer**
1993—*Tapestry: The Music of Carole King*, Musical, Revue, Lyricist, Composer
2014—*Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer

Debra Monk

- 1981—*Pump Boys and Dinettes*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer**
1982—*Pump Boys and Dinettes*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer
1987—*Oil City Symphony*, Musical, Bookwriter

Cass Morgan

- 1981—*Pump Boys and Dinettes*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer**
1982—*Pump Boys and Dinettes*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer

Julianne Boyd

- 1983—*A . . . My Name is Alice*, Musical, Revue, Bookwriter**

Judy Hart-Angelo

1983—*Preppies*, Musical, Bookwriter, Composer

Joan Micklin Silver

1983—*A . . . My Name is Alice*, Musical, Revue, Bookwriter

Susan Birkenhead

1984—*What About Luv?* Musical, Lyricist

1992—*Jelly's Last Jam*, Musical, Lyricist

1997—*Triumph of Love*, Musical, Lyricist

Barbara Damashek

1984—*Quilters: Women and Domestic Art*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer

Winnie Holzman

1987—*Birds of Paradise*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

2003—*Wicked*, Musical, Bookwriter

Mary Murfitt

1987—*Oil City Symphony*, Musical, Bookwriter

1996—*Cowgirls*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer

Lynn Ahrens

1988—*Lucky Stiff*, Musical, Lyricist

1990—*Once on This Island*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

1990—*Once on This Island*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

1992—*My Favorite Year*, Musical, Lyricist

1998—*Ragtime*, Musical, Drama, Lyricist

2000—*Seussical*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter, Lyricist

2002—*A Man of No Importance*, Musical, Lyricist

2005—*Dessa Rose*, Musical, Lyricist

2007—*Seussical*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

2007—*The Glorious Ones*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

2014—*Rocky*, Musical, Drama, Lyricist

2017—*Anastasia*, Musical, Lyricist

1990s

Marsha Norman

1991—*The Secret Garden*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

1993—*The Red Shoes*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

2005—*The Color Purple*, Musical, Drama, Bookwriter

2014—*The Bridges of Madison County*, Musical, Bookwriter

Lucy Simon

1991—*The Secret Garden*, Musical, Composer

2015—*Doctor Zhivago*, Musical, Drama, Composer

Polly Pen

1994—*Christina Alberta's Father*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer

1996—*Bed and Sofa*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer

Ann Duquesnay

1996—*Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer

Jeanine Tesori

1997—*Violet*, Musical, Composer

2002—*Thoroughly Modern Millie*, Musical, Comedy, Composer

2003—*Caroline, or Change*, Musical, Composer

2004—*Caroline, or Change*, Musical, Drama, Composer

2008—*Shrek the Musical*, Musical, Comedy, Composer

2012—*Fun Home*, Musical, Composer

2014—*Violet*, Musical, Drama, Composer

2015—*Fun Home*, Musical, Composer

Gerardine Clark

1998—*The Wind in the Willows*, Musical, Bookwriter

2000s

Kirsten Childs

2000—*The Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer

2005—*Miracle Brothers*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer

2017—*Bella: An American Tall Tale*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer

Nell Benjamin

2002—*Sarah, Plain and Tall*, Musical, Lyricist

2004—*Cam Jansen*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer

2007—*Legally Blonde*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist, Composer

2018—*Mean Girls*, Musical, Lyricist

Julia Jordan

2002—*Sarah, Plain and Tall*, Musical, Bookwriter

2012—*Murder Ballad*, Musical, Bookwriter

Debra Barsha

2003—*Radiant Baby*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer

2016—*A Taste of Things to Come*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer

Marcy Heisler

2004—*Junie B. Jones*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

2006—*Junie B's Essential Survival Guide to School*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

Zina Goldrich

2004—*Junie B. Jones*, Musical, Composer

2006—*Junie B's Essential Survival Guide to School*, Musical, Composer

Mindi Dickstein

2005—*Little Women*, Musical, Lyricist

Ilene Reid

2005—*Bingo*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer

Brenda Russell

2005—*The Color Purple*, Musical, Drama, Lyricist, Composer

Allee Willis

2005—*The Color Purple*, Musical, Drama, Lyricist, Composer

Amanda Green

2006—*High Fidelity*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist

2012—*Bring It On*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist

2013—*Hands on a Hardbody*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer

Kait Kerrigan

2006—*Henry and Mudge*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

Lisa Lambert

2006—*The Drowsy Chaperone*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist, Composer

Melissa Morris

2006—*Evil Dead: The Musical*, Musical, Composer

Quiara Alegría Hudes

2007—*In the Heights*, Musical, Bookwriter

2008—*In the Heights*, Musical, Bookwriter

2018—*Miss You Like Hell*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

Jill Santoriello

2008—*A Tale of Two Cities*, Musical, Drama, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer

Dolly Parton

2009—*9 to 5: The Musical*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist, Composer

Patricia Resnick

2009—*9 to 5: The Musical*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter

2010s

Lisa Kron

2012—*Fun Home*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

2015—*Fun Home*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist

Cyndi Lauper

2013—*Kinky Boots*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer

Barbara Anselmi

2015—*It Shoulda Been You*, Musical, Composer

Amy Powers

2015—*Doctor Zhivago*, Musical, Drama, Lyricist

Kristen Anderson-Lopez

2016—*In Transit*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer

2018—*Frozen*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist, Composer

Sara Bareilles

2016—*Waitress*, Musical, Drama, Lyricist, Composer

Edie Brickell

2016—*Bright Star*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer

Hollye Levin

2016—*A Taste of Things to Come*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer

Abigail Bengson

2017—*Hundred Days*, Musical, Bookwriter, Lyricist, Composer

Sarah Gancher

2017—*Hundred Days*, Musical, Bookwriter

Helen Park

2017—*KPOP*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer

Cher

2018—*The Cher Show*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer

Tina Fey

2018—*Mean Girls*, Musical, Bookwriter

The Go-Go's (Paula Jean Brown, Charlotte Caffey, Belinda Carlisle, Gina Schock, Kathy Valentine, Jane Wiedlin)

2018—*Head Over Heels*, Musical, Comedy, Lyricist, Composer

Jennifer Lee

2018—*Frozen*, Musical, Comedy, Bookwriter

Erin McKeown

2018—*Miss You Like Hell*, Musical, Composer

Donna Summer

2018—*Summer: The Donna Summer Musical*, Musical, Lyricist, Composer

APPENDIX 2

CHRONOLOGY OF CRYER AND FORD MUSICALS (COLLABORATIVE)

Year	Venue	Performance/Production
1955	DePauw University Greencastle, IN	<i>For Reasons of Royalty</i> (Sophomore Musical)
1957	DePauw University Greencastle, IN	<i>Hey, Angie!</i> (Senior Musical)
1961	Boston University Boston, MA	<i>Rendezvous</i> (David Cryer's Master's Project)
1967	Theatre de Lys Manhattan, NY	<i>Now Is the Time for All Good Men</i> (Off Broadway)
1970-71	Eastside Playhouse Manhattan, NY	<i>The Last Sweet Days of Isaac</i> (Off Broadway)
1973	John Golden Theatre Manhattan, NY	<i>Shelter</i> (Broadway)
1978	Anspacher Theater at The Public Theater Manhattan, NY	<i>I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road</i> (Off Broadway)
1978-1981	Circle in the Square Manhattan, NY	<i>I'm Getting My Act Together</i> (venue transfer)
1980	Summerfare Festival Purchase, NY	<i>Isaac & Ingrid & Michael</i>
1985	Manhattan Theater Club Manhattan, NY	<i>Hang On to the Good Times</i> (Off Broadway)
1986	Williamstown Theatre Festival Williamstown, MA	<i>Eleanor</i> (Regional Theater)
1997	York Theatre at St. Peter's Church Manhattan, NY	<i>The Last Sweet Days</i> (Off Broadway)

1998	American Girls Theater Chicago, IL	<i>The American Girls Revue</i>
2001	American Girls Theater Chicago, IL	<i>Circle of Friends: An American Girls Musical</i>
2003	American Girls Theater Manhattan, NY	<i>The American Girls Revue</i> <i>Circle of Friends: An American Girls Musical</i>
2006	American Girls Theater Los Angeles, CA	<i>The American Girls Revue</i> <i>Circle of Friends: An American Girls Musical</i>
2007	Lucille Lortel Theatre Manhattan, NY	<i>Anne of Green Gables</i> (Off Broadway)
2008	DePauw University Greencastle, IN	<i>Einstein and the Roosevelts</i>
2011	York Theatre at St. Peter's Church Manhattan, NY	<i>Still Getting My Act Together</i> (Off Broadway)
2011	Denison University Denison, OH	<i>Einstein and the Roosevelts</i>
2013	Encores! Off-Center at City Center Manhattan, NY	<i>I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road</i> (Off-Broadway Revival)
2015	Laguna Playhouse Laguna Beach, CA	<i>Still Getting My Act Together</i> (Regional Theater)
2017	Feinstein's/54 Below Manhattan, NY	<i>Shelter</i> (concert performance)

APPENDIX 3

CHRONOLOGY OF CRYER AND FORD CABARET PERFORMANCES

Year	Venue	Performance/Production
1973	Manhattan Theater Club Manhattan, NY	<i>SONGFEST Women</i> (“Circle of Sound”)
1975	Cookery Manhattan, NY	<i>Cryer and Ford</i>
1976	Ballroom Manhattan, NY	<i>Broadway at the Ballroom</i>
1977	Cookery Manhattan, NY	<i>Cryer and Ford</i>
1981	92 nd Street Y Manhattan, NY	“Lyrics and Lyricists”
2002	Triad Theater Manhattan, NY	<i>Timeless Divas!</i>
2007	59E59 Theaters Manhattan, NY	<i>Getting Their Act Together Again!</i>
2013	Feinstein’s/54 Below Manhattan, NY	<i>Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford Present: Binders Full of Women’s Songs</i>
2018	Cleveland Institute of Music Cleveland, OH	<i>The Musical Theater Project: An Afternoon With Cryer & Ford</i>

APPENDIX 4

CHRONOLOGY OF CRYER OR FORD THEATER PROJECTS (NON-COLLABORATIVE)

Musicals

Year	Venue	Performance/Production
1965	No Production	<i>The Game of Love</i> , Ford, composer
1968	No Production	<i>Booth is Back in Town</i> , Cryer, lyricist
1971	Public Theater Manhattan, NY	<i>The Wedding of Iphigenia</i> (Off Broadway), Cryer, lyricist
1982	Harold Clurman Theater Manhattan, NY	<i>With Love and Laughter</i> (Off Broadway), Cryer, song contributor
1983	Summerfare Festival Purchase, NY	<i>Booth! is Back in Town</i> , Cryer, lyricist
1992	Westside Theatre Manhattan, NY	<i>Cut the Ribbons: A Mother/Daughter Musical</i> , Ford, contributing composer
1994	York Theatre at St. Peter's Church Manhattan, NY	<i>Booth</i> , Cryer, lyricist
2009	Lyric Stage, Irving Arts Center Irving, TX	<i>Blue Roses</i> , Ford, composer
2016	Miracle Theatre Coral Gables, FL	<i>The Game of Love</i> , Ford, composer

Acting (Cryer)

Year	Venue	Performance/Production
1962	Lunt-Fontanne Theatre Manhattan, New York	<i>Little Me</i>

1963	Broadhurst Theatre Manhattan, New York	<i>110 in the Shade</i>
1969	46 th Street Theatre Manhattan, New York	<i>1776</i>
1983	Manhattan Theater Club Manhattan, NY	<i>Blue Plate Special</i> (Off Broadway)
1985	Williamstown Theatre Festival Williamstown, MA and St. Stephens Church Manhattan, NY	<i>To Whom It May Concern</i>
1986	WPA Theater Manhattan, NY	<i>Alterations</i> (Off Broadway)

Directing (Cryer)

Year	Venue	Performance/Production
2013	Theater for the New City Manhattan, NY	<i>Possibility Junkie</i>
2013	TBG Theater Manhattan, NY	<i>To Carry On . . . A Tribute to the Life and Music of Laura Nyro</i>
2015	York Theatre at St. Peter's Church Manhattan, NY	<i>The Starry Education of a Broadway Press Agent</i>

Cabaret

Year	Venue	Performance/Production
1989	Criterion Center Manhattan, NY	<i>Back in My Life</i> Gretchen Cryer
1999	Firebird Café (2 acts) Manhattan	<i>Mostly Music By Somebody Else</i> <i>Mostly the Lyrics of Gretchen Cryer</i> Nancy Ford

APPENDIX 5

*NOW IS THE TIME FOR ALL GOOD MEN*⁵⁰⁰

CAST

SARAH LARKIN, the music teacher.....	Gretchen Cryer ⁵⁰¹
EUGENIE SELDIN, the waitress.....	Judy Frank
MIKE BUTLER, the new teacher	David Cryer
TOONEY, the landlady	Donna Curtis
ALBERT MCKINLEY, the principal	David Sabin
BETTY BROWN, Home Economics.....	Margot Hanson
ESTHER MASON, Elementary English.....	Regina Lynn
HERBERT HELLER, the coach	Art Wallace
BILL MILLER, Science.....	John Bennett Perry
JASPER WILKINS, Agriculture.....	Murray Olson
RAMONA	Anne Kaye
TOMMY	Steve Skiles
UNDERSTUDIES	Judy Allen, Sharon Stuntz, John Long

⁵⁰⁰ Cryer and Ford, *Now Is the Time*, 3. The 1967 musical was a revision of *What's In The Wind*, which has a copyright date of 1966.

⁵⁰¹ Cryer uses the stage name, Sally Niven, in the production.

APPENDIX 6

NOW IS THE TIME FOR ALL GOOD MEN

MUSICAL NUMBERS⁵⁰²

ACT ONE

We Shall Meet in the Great Hereafter	The Company
Keep 'em Busy, Keep 'em Quiet.....	Miller, Albert, Esther, Mike, Betty Sarah, Jasper, Herbert
What's in the Air	Mike ⁵⁰³
Tea in the Rain.....	Sarah
What's A Guy Like You Doin' in a Place Like This?.....	Eugenie
Halloween Hayride	Betty, Tooney, Esther, Miller, Jasper, Tommy, Ramona
Katydid	Betty, Miller, Esther, Jasper, Tooney, Tommy, Ramona
See Everything New	Mike and Sarah
All Alone	Mike
He Could Show Me	Sarah
Washed Away	Tooney, Esther, Albert, Sarah, Herbert, Jasper, Miller, Tommy, Ramona, Betty
Stuck-Up	Eugenie
My Holiday	Sarah and Mike
Down Through History.....	Tommy and Ramona
Reprise: All Alone	Tommy and Mike

⁵⁰² Cryer and Ford, *Now Is the Time*, 4.

⁵⁰³ Dietz, *Off Broadway Musicals*, 323. The Samuel French book includes "What's in the Air," which was dropped shortly after the opening, and "Katydid" and "Down Through History" that may not have been heard in the New York production.

NOW IS THE TIME FOR ALL GOOD MEN

ACT TWO

It Was Good Enough for Grandpa	The Company
A Simple Life	Albert and Sarah
A Star on the Monument	Herbert, Miller, Jasper, Tommy
Rain Your Love on Me	Mike and Sarah
Reprise: Stuck-Up.....	Eugenie
There's Goin' to be a Wedding	Herbert, Tooney, Tommy, Ramona, Betty, Miller, Esther, Jasper
Quintet Reprise: All Alone	Tommy, Ramona, Mike, Herbert, Tooney

APPENDIX 7

THE LAST SWEET DAYS OF ISAAC

CAST⁵⁰⁴

THE ELEVATOR

ISAAC Austin Pendleton

INGRID Fredricka Weber

I WANT TO WALK TO SAN FRANCISCO

POLICEMAN C. David Colson⁵⁰⁵

ALICE Fredricka Weber

ISAAC Austin Pendleton

THE ZEITGEIST

Vocal: C. David Colson, Louise Heath, John Long

Electric Harpsichord: Clay Fullum

Pianist: George Broderick

Bass: Aaron Bell

Percussion: Harry Gist

Guitar: Art Betker

⁵⁰⁴ Ford, scrapbook materials, *The Last Sweet Days of Isaac*, Program, East Side Playhouse.

⁵⁰⁵ Dietz, *Off Broadway Musicals*, 249. Dietz notes that C. David Colson left the cast, and joined an upcoming Broadway production of *Purlie*.

APPENDIX 8

THE LAST SWEET DAYS OF ISAAC

MUSICAL NUMBERS⁵⁰⁶

PART I—THE ELEVATOR

Opening	The Zeitgeist
The Last Sweet Days of Isaac.....	Isaac
A Transparent Crystal Moment	Isaac
My Most Important Moments Go By	Ingrid
Love You Came To Me	Ingrid and Isaac

PART II—I WANT TO WALK TO SAN FRANCISCO⁵⁰⁷

I Want To Walk To San Francisco	The Zeitgeist
Somebody Died Today	C. David Colson, The Zeitgeist
Herein Lie The Seeds Of Revolution	Isaac and The Zeitgeist
I Can't Live In Solitary.....	Alice and The Zeitgeist
Touching Your Hand Is Like Touching Your Mind.....	The Zeitgeist
Yes, I Know That I'm Alive	Alice, Isaac and The Zeitgeist
Finale	Isaac, Alice and The Zeitgeist

⁵⁰⁶ Ford, scrapbook materials, *The Last Sweet Days of Isaac*, Program, East Side Playhouse.

⁵⁰⁷ Dietz, *Off Broadway Musicals*, 249. Dietz notes that after the opening, three numbers were added: "Somebody Died Today," "Herein Lie the Seeds of Revolution," and "I Can't Live in Solitary." The Zeitgeist's presence became more prominent, and included a short concert after the show's curtain call. The script, published by Metromedia on Stage in 1969, does not include the three new numbers. They appear on the RCA Victor Records cast album [LP # LSO-1169].

APPENDIX 9

SHELTER

CAST⁵⁰⁸

MAUD	Marcia Rodd
MICHAEL	Terry Kiser
WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER	Susan Browning
GLORIA	Joanna Merlin
ARTHUR.....	Tony Wells
TELEVISION CREW	Charles Collins, Britt Swanson
VOICE OF DIRECTOR.....	Philip Kraus

⁵⁰⁸ Cryer and Ford, *Shelter*, 3.

APPENDIX 10

*SHELTER*⁵⁰⁹

MUSICAL NUMBERS⁵¹⁰

ACT ONE

Overture	Arthur
Changing.....	Maud and Arthur
Welcome to a New World	Michael and Arthur
It's Hard to Care	Michael, Arthur and Maud
Woke Up Today.....	Maud and Arthur
Mary Margaret's House in the Country.....	Maud and Arthur
Woman on the Run	Arthur
Don't Tell Me It's Forever	Maud, Michael and Arthur

ACT TWO

Sunrise	Arthur
I Bring Him Seashells.....	Wednesday November
She's My Girl	Michael, Maud and Arthur
Reprise: Welcome to a New World.....	Maud, Michael, Arthur and Wednesday November
He's a Fool.....	Wednesday November and Maud
Goin' Home With My Children.....	Maud and Arthur
Sleep, My Baby, Sleep	Arthur

⁵⁰⁹ Ford, scrapbook materials, *Shelter*, *Playbill*, 1973.

⁵¹⁰ Dietz, *1970s Broadway Musicals*, 151. Columbia Records recorded the original production of *Shelter* (1973), but never issued a commercial release due to the short run. The hybrid musical, *The Last Sweet Days*, was recorded as *Shelter* in 1997 (Original Cast Records CD # OC-9785). The recording includes most of the songs from *The Elevator*; seven songs from the original *Shelter* ("Changing," "It's Hard to Care," "Mary Margaret's House in the Country," "Woman on the Run," "I Bring Him Seashells," "She's My Girl," and "Sleep, My Baby, Sleep"), and two new numbers ("Like a River," and "Goodbye, Plastic Flowers"). The CD includes four additional songs from *Shelter* omitted by Dietz: "Welcome to a New World," "Woke Up Today," "Too Many Women in My Life," and "Goin' Home With My Children." All but "Too Many Women in My Life" are listed in *Playbill* above.

APPENDIX 11

ALBUMS

Cryer & Ford (1975)

Side A

Long Time Gone—Music by Nancy Ford/Lyrics by Gretchen Cryer
You Can Never Know My Mind—Music by Nancy Ford/Lyrics by Gretchen Cryer
Randy—Music by Nancy Ford/Lyrics by Gretchen Cryer
Do Whatcha Gotta Do to Make Yourself Happy—Music and Lyrics by Gretchen Cryer
Whole Woman—Music by Nancy Ford/Lyrics by Gretchen Cryer

Side B

Joy—Music by Nancy Ford/Lyrics by Gretchen Cryer
Gentle Kind of Loving—Music and Lyrics by Gretchen Cryer
Blackberry Wine—Music and Lyrics by Gretchen Cryer
Hang On to the Good Times—Music by Nancy Ford/Lyrics by Gretchen Cryer
Changing—Music by Nancy Ford/Lyrics by Gretchen Cryer

Cryer and Ford: You Know My Music (1977)

Side A

You Know My Music—Music and Lyrics by Gretchen Cryer
I Don't Want to be Free of You—Music and Lyrics by Nancy Ford
Big Bill Murphy—Music by Nancy Ford/Lyrics by Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford
Last Day at the Job—Music by Nancy Ford/Lyrics by Gretchen Cryer
You Can Kill Love—Music by Nancy Ford/Lyrics by Gretchen Cryer

Side B

Sunshine Rain—Music by Nancy Ford/Lyrics by Gretchen Cryer
Another Unhappy Love Song—Music by Nancy Ford/Lyrics by Gretchen Cryer
Sweet Solitude—Music and Lyrics by Gretchen Cryer
Clingin' Vine (Wonder Woman)—Music by Nancy Ford/Lyrics by Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford
Natural High—Music by Nancy Ford/Lyrics by Gretchen Cryer

APPENDIX 12

I'M GETTING MY ACT TOGETHER AND TAKING IT ON THE ROAD

ORIGINAL CAST⁵¹¹

(in order of appearance)

JOE	Joel Fabiani
HEATHER.....	Gretchen Cryer
ALICE	Margot Rose
CHERYL	Betty Aberlin
JAKE (ACOUSTIC GUITARIST).....	Don Scardino
PIANIST	Scott Berry
ELECTRIC GUITARIST	Lee Grayson
PERCUSSIONIST (DRUMMER)	Bob George
BASSIST	Dean Swenson

⁵¹¹ Cryer and Ford, *I'm Getting My Act Together*, 3.

APPENDIX 13

I'M GETTING MY ACT TOGETHER AND TAKING IT ON THE ROAD

MUSICAL NUMBERS⁵¹²

Natural High	Heather, Alice, Cheryl, and The Liberated Men's Band
Smile	Heather, Jake, Cheryl, Alice, and the Band
In A Simple Way I Love You	Heather and the Band
Miss America	Heather, Alice, Cheryl
Strong Woman Number	Alice, Heather, Cheryl
Dear Tom	Heather
Old Friend	Heather
Reprise: In A Simple Way I Love You	Jake
Put In A Package And Sold	Heather, Alice, Cheryl
If Only Things Was Different	Jake ⁵¹³
Feel The Love	The Company
Lonely Lady	Heather
Happy Birthday	Heather and the Band
Reprise: Natural High	The Company

⁵¹² Cryer and Ford, *I'm Getting My Act Together*, 4.

⁵¹³ Dietz, *Off Broadway Musicals*, 214. The cast album did not include "If Only Things Was Different," although it is included on the London cast album, recorded on That's Entertainment Records (LP # TER-1006).

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